

Non-Unique Forms of Continuity in Rural Space: aspects of “Romanisation” in North-western Greece through the so-called fortified farmsteads

Giacomo Sigismondo*

Abstract. *During the Illyrian and Macedonian wars, North-western Greece was one of the first regions which had to face the Roman presence. The concept of “Romanisation” – a complex, diachronic and multifaceted phenomenon – was recently questioned and criticized and the use of the term, too, was debated. Inevitably, this geographical area was deeply involved in the process of “Romanisation”. As for Epirus, in the last decades archaeological research has given new data to deal with the topic, the majority of which derived from urban excavations, less frequently from rural contexts. Some hints are offered by a particular category of sites, the so-called fortified farmsteads or villas. In this paper the relationship between these buildings and other evidence from Chaonia and Thesprotia is investigated emphasising continuity and disruption in the light of the settlement patterns. After the Roman conquest, many of these sites were not destroyed or abandoned but continued to be settled and were refurbished. A comparable trend is observable in some fortifications (such as Malathe, in present-day Southern Albania). Some of them were altered and changed their functions, probably responding to new settlement dynamics, which, beyond sub-regional characteristic, should be considered as part of a wider phenomenon.*

Riassunto. *La Grecia nord-occidentale fu tra i territori al di fuori della Penisola che più precocemente si trovarono a confrontarsi con Roma, in particolare nel corso delle guerre illiriche e macedoniche. Inevitabilmente anche questa regione fu coinvolta in quel fenomeno ampio, diacronico e sfaccettato comunemente condensato nel termine ‘romanizzazione’, un concetto in anni recenti al centro di un dibattito che ne ha messo in discussione l’affermazione e l’utilizzo. Negli ultimi decenni l’archeologia ha offerto per l’Epiro nuovi dati per affrontare il tema, soprattutto a partire dai contesti urbani, più di rado si è volto lo sguardo alle campagne. Una particolare categoria di edifici epiroti nota come residenze o fattorie fortificate offre alcuni spunti di riflessione sul tema, in particolare grazie al confronto con altre evidenze provenienti dalla Caonia e dalla Tesprozia e alla luce del più ampio quadro insediativo dell’Epiro. In molti di questi siti, dopo la conquista romana, non si notano tracce di distruzione ma, piuttosto, sono attestate continuità di frequentazione e ristrutturazioni. Fenomeni del genere sono osservabili anche nei casi di siti fortificati con valore strategico-militare (ad esempio Malathre, in Albania meridionale). Alcuni subiscono trasformazioni e sembrano acquisire funzioni nuove e diverse, alla luce di dinamiche di popolamento che, pur presentando differenze a carattere sub-regionale, sembrano potersi leggere in maniere unitaria.*

Ancient Epirus, corresponding to present-day North-western Greece and Southern Albania, has long been considered a periphery of the Greek world by modern scholarship. As a matter of fact, it was a border region, and, therefore, it was characterised by fluidity. Boundaries primarily exist on the environmental side, and

* Università del Salento; giacomo.sigismondo@unisalento.it

we can still observe a continuous encounter between the sea and the mainland: the steep and massive mountains, which represent most of the territory, come down to the shore and rushing rivers cut them through, often creating swamps at their mouths usable as natural harbours. The name itself ἠπειρος was originally given by seamen watching the rough coastline, highlighting the opposition between the mainland and the better-known universe of the islands and the maritime trade routes. Here the so-called Greek Colonisation moved towards the Western Mediterranean, from the 8th century BC, in the footsteps of the Mycenaeans¹. Time after time, local communities benefitted from the position of Epirus as a middle region in the increasingly interrelated world, gaining a connecting role. Nevertheless, it was only in the Hellenistic period that the puzzle of tribes inhabiting the region – among them the most prominent *ethne* were the Chaonians, the Thesprotians and the Molossians (fig. 1) – achieved the political unit as a state, under the hegemony of the Aeacid monarchy, probably thanks to its strong relation with the Macedonian kingdom².



Fig. 1. Ancient Epirus and its three main sub-regions: Molossia Chaonia, and Thesprotia (author's elaboration).

¹ See L. BRACCESI, *Ionios Poros. La Porta dell'Occidente*, Roma, L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2014, pp. 11-14; T.F. TARTATON, *Fragments of a Maritime Small World: Glykys Limin and Trans-Ionian Trade in the Mycenaean Period*, in E. MERMIGKA (edited by), *Σπείρα. Επιστημονική συνάντηση προς τιμήν της Αγγέλικας Ντούζουγλη και του Κωνσταντίνου Ζάχου*, Αθήνα, Ταμείο Αρχαιολογικών Πόρων και Απαλλοτριώσεων, 2017, pp. 1-14.

² With different perspectives P. CABANES, *L'Épire et le royaume des Molosses à l'époque d'Alexandre le Molosse*, in *Alessandro il Molosso e i condottieri in Magna Grecia*, Atti del XLIV Convegno di studi sulla Magna Grecia (Taranto-Cosenza, 26-30 settembre 2003), Taranto, Istituto per la storia e l'archeologia della Magna Grecia, 2004, pp. 11-52; E.A. MEYER, *The Inscriptions of Dodona and a new history of Molossia*, Stuttgart, Steiner, 2013; J. PASCUAL, *From the Fifth Century to 167 B.C.: Reconstructing the History of Ancient Epirus*, in A.J DOMÍNGUEZ (edited by), *Politics, Territory and Identity in Ancient Epirus*, Pisa, ETS, 2018, pp. 43-99.

The birth of a state between the 4th and the 3rd century BC progressively shifted the notion of Epirus, from a merely geographical perspective to a more defined political one, but the shaping process did not dismantle the tribal organisation, also through to the transformation into confederation, the κοινόν τῶν Ἠπειρωτῶν, after the middle of the 3rd century BC. It is not my intention to debate the historical issues about the development of the Epirote state, but we can point out that, within the new configuration, the loss of independence of the single communities did not result in a loss of autonomy, guaranteed by the system of smaller *koiná*, and of single *ethnoi*; on the other hand, it could be more effective in dealing with a rapidly changing international background. This framework fitted the enduring fragmentation, to some extent a reflection of the physiography of the region, extending from the Acroceraunian mountains to the North, to the Pindus range to the East, and to the Ambracian gulf to the South, although boundaries should be conceived as highly dynamics, especially due to the presence of strong neighbours such as the Illyrians, the Macedonians and the Aetolian League³. Moreover, this period saw the progressive rise of Roman and Carthaginian power. Consequently, it should not be surprising that the area between the lower Adriatic and the upper Ionian Sea was involved in what Polybius defined the «τὴν πρώτην διάβασιν» (2.2.1), that is the first crossing by the Romans, which consists in their intervention in the Balkans against the Illyrian reign in 229 BC, establishing what Maurice Holleaux called Roman protectorate⁴. In the last decades of the 3rd century BC, on the eve of the clash between Rome and Carthage, the situation in the Mediterranean basin reflected a complex and deeply interrelated scenario: progressive strengthening of the Macedonian kingship, one of the most resolute Romans’ opponents, and its effort to maintain the hegemony on the Greek peninsula drove to the conflict. This was prevented only because of the difficulties connected to the *bellum hannibalicum* as for Rome, and because of the struggle against the Aetolian League as for the Macedonians⁵. But the outbreak of the war was around the corner and in

³ P. CABANES, *Réflexions sur quelques problèmes historiques des confins Illyro-épirotes (IVe-Ier siècles avant J.-C.)*, in ID. (edited by), *L’Illyrie méridionale et l’Épire dans l’Antiquité*, Actes du colloque international de Clermont-Ferrand (22-25 octobre 1984), Clermont-Ferrand, Adosa, 1987, pp. 17-27. Recently a synthesis in G.M. GEROGIANNIS, *L’Epiro dei Molossi. Difesa e gestione del territorio*, Roma, Quasar, 2021, pp. 57-83; see also B. FORSEN, *Disruption and Development: Tracing Imperial Vestiges in Epirus*, in ID. (edited by), *Thesprotia expedition IV. Region transformed by Empire*, Helsinki, Suomen Ateenan-Instituutin säätiö, 2019, pp. 1-18, part. pp. 3-4.

⁴ This was an area under indirect Roman control including the important ports of Epidamnus-Dyrrachium and Apollonia. See P. CABANES, *Les effets de l’arrivée des Romains en Épire et Illyrie méridionale (IIIe – Ier siècles avant J.-C.)*, in R. PERNA, R. CARMENATI, M. GIULIODORI (a cura di), *Roma e l’Adriatico. Dalla ricerca archeologica alla pianificazione del territorio. II.2. Adriatico centromeridionale*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale (Macerata, 18-20 maggio 2017), Roma, Quasar, 2022, pp. 853-864, part. pp. 853-854. For the lucky expression M. HOLLEAUX, *Rome, la Grèce et les monarchies hellénistiques au III^e siècle avant J.-C. (273-205)*, Paris, De Boccard, 1921, part. p. 97.

⁵ J. THORNTON, *Le guerre macedoniche*, Roma, Carocci, 2014, p. 26 e p. 30.

the following fifty years Epirus played a key role and its territory was the main battlefield. After the Roman victory at Pydna (168 BC) and the repression of the insurrection headed by Andriscus (149-148 BC), the epilogue was the creation of a new province twenty years later: until the middle of the 1st century BC the proconsul's authority probably included Southern Illyria and Epirus, where the Epirote League continued to exist only formally as it occurred for the Greek *poleis* after the destruction of Corinth (146 BC)⁶. Therefore, Epirus is a portion of Greece interested by an early presence of Rome, both on the political level, as we know from the diplomatic interference, and on the economic side⁷.

In recent years the discussion regarding settlement dynamics in Epirus from the Late Bronze age to the Roman era has been renewed thanks to archaeological excavations and surveys⁸. Notably new data helped to focus on the transitional phase between the Classical and the Hellenistic period as well as the decades corresponding to the birth of the Epirote state, a span of time connected to the rise of urban centres in Epirus. In the past, attention was mainly given to those settlement characterised by (presumed) clear urban features, within a territory where proper *poleis* were scarce compared to the rest of Greece. Furthermore, considering the periphery halo of North-western Greek world, it was self-evident that the urbanism would have flourished only later, under the push of a strong power as the one of the Molossian monarchy under Pyrrhus' reign. Even if we still

⁶ A. RAGGI, *Macedonia, Acaia, Epiro*, in S. SEGENNI (a cura di), *Roma e le sue province. Dalla prima guerra punica a Diocleziano*, Roma, Carocci, 2015, pp. 163-170, part. pp. 163-164. On the plundering of Epirus by Lucius Aemilius Paullus' troops after Pydna see B. FORSÉN, *Destruction, Survival and Colonisation. Effects of the Roman Arrival to Epirus*, in S. FACHARD, E.M. HARRIS (edited by), *The Destruction of Cities in the Ancient Greek World. Integrating the Archaeological and Literary Evidence*, Cambridge, University Press, 2021, pp. 228-257; E. GIORGI, *The destruction of Epirus after Pydna. Archaeology and literature*, in M. CIPRIANI et alii (a cura di), *Dialoghi sull'Archeologia della Magna Grecia e del Mediterraneo*, Atti del V Convegno Internazionale (Paestum, 19-21 novembre 2020), Paestum, Pandemos, 2022, pp. 91-105.

⁷ G. BANDELLI, *Roma e l'Adriatico fra III e II secolo a.C.*, in C. ZACCARIA (a cura di), *Strutture portuali e rotte marittime nell'Adriatico di età romana*, Atti della XXIX Settimana di studi aquileiesi (20-23 maggio 1998), Trieste-Roma, Centro di Antichità Altoadriatiche, 2001, pp. 17-41, part. 22-25; C. ANTONETTI, *I diversi aspetti di una koine socio-culturale nella Grecia nord-occidentale di epoca ellenistica*, in ID. (a cura di), *Lo spazio ionico e le comunità della Grecia nord-occidentale. Territorio, società, istituzioni*, Pisa, ETS Edizioni, 2010, pp. 301-326, part. pp. 301-303.

⁸ E. GIORGI, J. BOGDANI, *Il territorio di Phoinike in Caonia. Archeologia del paesaggio in Albania meridionale*, Bologna, AnteQuem, 2012; R. PERNA, DH. ÇONDI (a cura di), *Hadrianopolis. II. Risultati delle indagini archeologiche 2005-2010*, Bari, Edipuglia 2012; G. PLIAKOU, *The basin of Ioannina in central Epirus, Northwestern Greece, from the Early Iron Age to the Roman period*, in «Archaeological Reports», 64, 2018, pp. 133-151; B. FORSÉN (edited by), *Thesprotia Expedition I. Towards a regional history*, Helsinki, Suomen Ateenan-Instituutin säätiö, 2009; B. FORSÉN, E. TIKKALA (edited by), *Thesprotia Expedition II. Environment and settlement patterns*, Helsinki, Suomen Ateenan-Instituutin säätiö, 2011; B. FORSÉN, N. GALANIDOU, E. TIKKALA (edited by), *Thesprotia Expedition III. Landscape of nomadism and sedentism*, Helsinki, Suomen Ateenan-Instituutin säätiö, 2016; FORSÉN B. (edited by), *Thesprotia expedition IV*, cit.; G.M. GEROGIANNIS, *L'Epiro dei Molossi*, cit.

have to face a persistent lack of updated chronologies and stratigraphic excavations in urban contexts, it is now accepted that major settlements in Epirus took shape from the second half of the 4th to the first half of the 2nd century BC, but it was not a homogeneous phenomenon. In the case of Molossia, Thesprotia and Kassopaia, the sites of Passarón, Elea, Gitana and Kassope emerged between the mid-4th century and the early 3rd century BC, with progressive development over the next hundred and fifty years⁹. As for Chaonia this process seems to be delayed in the coastal region, where excavations at ancient Phoinike demonstrated that the impressive settlement on the large hill got a full urban layout only between the end of the 3rd/early 2nd century BC, in contrast with the literary imagery of the “great Phoinike” essentially based on Polybius’ account of the Illyrian raid in 230 BC (2.6.8 and 2.8.5)¹⁰. A different trend could be seen at Antigonea, the other main Chaonian city, whose foundation seems to be placed under the reign of Pyrrhus, despite the uncertainty of the available archaeological data, which, however, do not point before the 3rd century BC¹¹. So, the process did not follow a linear path in the whole country, also because of regionalism due to the fragmentation of the *ethne*, but it can be caused by the same concentration of political power in “tribal and federal capitals” and it could be interpreted as a response to dramatic socio-political changes in the Mediterranean¹². On one hand the appearance of cities could have answered to the centralising push to which traditional systems, more tied to the territory and its economy, were not suited for; on the other, it could be a suitable instrument of control for the young state, together with a possible demographic increase. The populating pattern by scattered open villages, recorded for late-Classical era, was no more sufficient *per se*, nevertheless it is incorrect to presume that such a system had been completely dismissed, especially because it

⁹ E. RINALDI, *Agorai ed edilizia pubblica civile nell’Epiro di età ellenistica*, Bologna, University Press, 2020. For the identification of the ancient Passarón with the present-day Ioannina, after the excavations under the late-Ottoman castle, see G. PLIAKOU, *The basin of Ioannina in central Epirus*, cit., pp. 142-145. For a more nuanced view about its role in the Molossian territory see G.M. GEROGIANNIS, *L’Epiro dei Molossi*, cit., pp. 141-144 e p. 478.

¹⁰ E. GIORGI, G. LEPORÉ, *Comparing Phoinike and Butrint. Some remarks on the walls of two cities in Northern Epirus*, in L.M. CALIÒ, G.M. GEROGIANNIS, M. KOPSACHEILI (edited by), *Fortificazioni e società nel Mediterraneo occidentale. Albania e Grecia settentrionale*, Atti del Convegno di Archeologia (Catania-Siracusa 14-16 febbraio 2019), Roma, Quasar 2020, pp. 153-181.

¹¹ R. PERNA, DH. ÇONDI, *Fortificazioni e siti fortificati in Caonia e nella valle del Drino*, in R. PERNA, R. CARMENATI, M. GIULIODORI (edited by), *Roma e l’Adriatico*, cit., pp. 771-796, part. pp. 773-775. Preliminary data from the Italo-Albanian excavations at Antigonea seem to confirm this chronology (R. Carmenati and L. Xavier de Silva’s speech at this same workshop). Regarding the so-called pseudo-urban settlement in the Drino valley, in absence of archaeological updated data coming from stratigraphic excavations, chronologies are problematic and consequently some considerations about settlement dynamics remain questionable.

¹² These changes also involved institutional frameworks, see E. RINALDI, *I luoghi della vita politica e amministrativa nelle città dell’Epiro*, in A.J DOMÍNGUEZ (edited by), *Politics, Territory and Identity in Ancient Epirus*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2018, pp. 249-282, part. pp. 263-270.

was strictly functional to a wide-ranging exploitation of resources¹³. Cities often testify an earlier human presence but there is no clear evidence of synecism and, despite abandonment of villages is documented between the 4th and the 3rd century BC (for example, at Vitsa Zagouriou and Liatovouni, in Molossia), current research demonstrated that many open settlements continued to exist in the Hellenistic period, next to much structured centres, as in the case of the Ioannina basin and the Kokytos valley¹⁴. So, we can assume that, as Pseudo-Scylax testifies for the previous period, most of Epirotes continued to live *katà komas* also during the 3rd and the 2nd century BC¹⁵. This picture is helpful to explain the very dense presence of fortified settlement spread all over Epirus, variously defined as pseudo-urban settlements or acropoleis, such as Megalo Gardiki (fig. 2) and Kastritsa in the Ioannina basin, *Orraon* near the Ambracian gulf, Agios Donatos in the Kokytos valley, Malçan, Paleomonastir and Çuka e Ajtoit in the region of *Phoinike*, and Melan, Selcka and Lekël in the Drino valley, just to mention the best known¹⁶. It is worthy to notice that the forementioned sites are often characterised by elements typical of full-fledged urban centres (large areas surrounded by formidable walls, organisation of space according to orthogonal criteria, public and residential buildings) but they show an evident strategic role, as it emerges from their location,

¹³ E. GIORGI, *Another Greece. The population of Northern Epirus and the genesis of Butrint in the Archaic period*, in R. BRANCATO et alii (a cura di), *Schemata. La città oltre la forma. Per una nuova definizione dei paesaggi urbani e delle loro funzioni: urbanizzazione e società nel Mediterraneo pre-classico. Età arcaica*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale (Siracusa, 26-28 febbraio 2020), Roma, Quasar, 2022, pp. 477-502. For some reconsideration around the Epirote economy in the light of the agrarian exploitation see A.J. DOMÍNGUEZ, *Agrarian and Power Landscapes in Epeiros during the Late Classical and Hellenistic Periods*, in «Géron. Revista de Historia Antigua», 40, 2022, pp. 463-494.

¹⁴ G. PLIAKOU, *The basin of Ioannina in central Epirus*, cit., part. p. 148; FORSÉN B., *The Emerging Settlement Patterns of the Kokytos Valley*, in B. FORSÉN, E. TIKKALA (edited by), *Thesprotia Expedition II*, cit., pp. 1-37, part. pp. 8-21. On the thesis of synecism as driving process of Epirote urbanism see S. DAKARIS, *Organisation politique et urbanistique dans l'Épire antique*, in *L'Illyrie méridionale et l'Épire dans l'Antiquité*, cit., pp. 71-75; J.K. PAPADOPOULOS, *Komai, Colonies and Cities in Epirus and Southern Albania: The Failure of the Polis and the Rise of Urbanism on the Fringes of the Greek World*, in B.P.C. MOLLOY (edited by), *Of Odysseys and Oddities. Scales and modes of interaction between prehistoric Aegean societies and their neighbours*, Oxford-Philadelphia, Oxbow Books, 2016, pp. 435-460, part. pp. 444-450.

¹⁵ In the periplus it is highlighted that Chaonians, Thesprotians, Kassopeans and Molossians «οικοῦσι [...] κατὰ κώμας», that is they «settle in villages» (Ps. SCYL., 28 and 30-32).

¹⁶ R. PERNA, DH. ÇONDI, *Fortificazioni e siti fortificati in Caonia e nella valle del Drino*, cit., p. 776 and pp. 779-780; G. PLIAKOU, *The basin of Ioannina in central Epirus*, cit., p. 140. For a brief overview on Megalo Gardiki, Kastritsa and *Orraon* G.M. GEROGIANNIS, *L'Épire dei Molossi*, cit., pp. 316-327 (MO_35), 331-351 (MO_35) and 387-400 (MO_50); for Agios Donatos M. SUHA, *The Fortification Walls of Agios Donatos*, in B. FORSÉN (edited by), *Thesprotia Expedition I*, cit., pp. 119-132; for Çuka e Ajtoit, Malçan and Paleomonastir E. GIORGI, J. BOGDANI, *Il territorio di Phoinike in Caonia. Archeologia del paesaggio in Albania meridionale*, cit., pp. 184-186 (SA028), 190-192 (SA036) and 249-252 (SA042); for Selcka, Lekël and Melan A. MARZIALI et alii, *La valle del Drino in età ellenistica*, R. PERNA, DH. ÇONDI (a cura di), *Hadrianopolis II*, cit., pp. 78-85.



Fig. 2. Kastris hill (Greece). Plan of the fortified settlement of Magalo Gardiki (from G. PLIAKOU, *The basin of Ioannina in central Epirus*, cit.).

position, and mutual intervisibility¹⁷. In our opinion, it is correct to interpret them as fortified settlement which operated as administrative hubs for different communities (*ethne*) organised in federal entities (*koinà*)¹⁸. The resulting overall framework is a multi-level pyramidal system in which every component is strictly

¹⁷ An attempt to categorise Molossian sites is G.M. GEROGIANNIS, *L'Epiro dei Molossi*, cit., pp. 202-204, defining four categories (fortified settlements, fortifications, towers and fortifications in rubble walls) which does not include urban settlements. *Ivi*, p. 478 it is mentioned another classification developed for different periods and areas in Greece, with reference to M.H. HANSEN, T.H. NIELSEN (edited by), *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis. An Investigation conducted by the Copenhagen Polis Centre for the Danish National Research Foundation*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2004.

¹⁸ They have been acutely defined as strongholds «at the service of the communities» in L.M. CALIÒ, *L'architettura fortificata in Occidente tra la Sicilia e l'Epiro*, in L.M. CALIÒ, J. DES COURTILS (a cura di), *L'architettura greca in Occidente nel III secolo a.C.*, Atti del Convegno di Studi (Pompei-Napoli, 20-22 maggio 2015), Roma, Quasar, 2017, pp. 323-367, part. p. 340.

integrated, even if slightly different settlement patterns are visible between some regions¹⁹.

Next to few full-fledged cities, more or less structured fortified settlement and scarcely documented *komai*, there is another type of sites whose presence is notable in Epirus, especially in the Chaonian region known in the literature as fortified residences or villas or even fortified farmsteads²⁰. These buildings show some common elements the most distinctive of which are the topographic location and the plan: they are situated in the countryside, close to alluvial floodplains, along the road network and at a short distance from the main centres but not in a naturally defended position. They are characterised by a boundary wall, surrounding an open-air space where a tower-shaped building is usually located in the centre of a courtyard. As we said, the better-known examples are in present-day Southern Albania, in the territory of ancient Phoinike, at Çumpora, Metoq, and Dobra, but some of them have been recognised also in the Drino valley and perhaps even in Thesprotia, at the famous site of the so-called Nekyomanteion/Necromanteion (fig. 3)²¹. Nowadays they are currently interpreted as residential facilities pertinent to rural estates of the Epirote aristocracy, possibly involved in the process of shaping agrarian landscape promoted by the Aeacids thanks to the relationship with

¹⁹ G.M. GEROGIANNIS, *L'Epiro dei Molossi*, cit., pp. 478-481. In his interpretation the author especially fosters a perspective of the "militarised landscapes". See also A.J. DOMÍNGUEZ, *Agrarian and Power Landscapes in Epeiros*, cit., pp. 472-473.

²⁰ There are few archaeological works dealing specifically with these buildings and they focused almost exclusively on Chaonian samples, which are the best known, despite the uncertainty of available data. Among them it is to mention the paper by J. Bogdani (J. BOGDANI, *Le residenze rurali della Caonia ellenistica. Note per una nuova lettura*, in «Agri Centuriati. An international journal of landscape Archaeology», 8, 2011, pp. 121-144) and the monograph by Dh. Çondi (DH. ÇONDI, *Banesat e fortifikuara - vila në Kaoni*, Gjirokastër, c, 2010). However, the content of the latter, although derived from first-hand data, is scarcely reliable, as can be seen in the recent re-examination of the site at Borshi in K. ÇIPA, *Ridokumentimi dhe rivlerësimi i kullës së Muzgës, në Borsh*, in «Candavia», 9, 2022, pp. 179-187. For a new assesment on the topic see F. CARBOTTI et alii, *Paesaggi d'Epiro. Studi di archeologia del paesaggio in Albania meridionale*, Bologna, University Press, 2024, pp. 119-167.

²¹ For Çumpora and Metoq see DH. ÇONDI, *Banesat e fortifikuara – Vila një aspekt i rëndësishëm në zhvillimin urbanistik të Kaonisë*, in «Iliria. Studime dhe materiale arkeologjike», 41, 2017, pp. 163-194, part. pp. 165-182. For Dobra see ID., *Banesa e fortifikuar-vilë në Dobër*, in «Iliria. Studime dhe materiale arkeologjike», 42, 2018, pp. 173-198; here an Anglo-Albanian project is carrying out excavations. As for the sites in the Drino valley see R. PERNA, *Hadrianopolis e la valle del Drino (Albania). Considerazioni sulle trasformazioni dell'insediamento e del territorio dall'età ellenistica a quella bizantina (campagne di scavo e surveys 2011-2015)*, in «Annuario della Scuola Archeologica di Atene e delle Missioni Italiane in Oriente», 92, 2014, pp. 195-248, part. p. 210. For the inclusion of the site at Mesopotamos in the category at issue D. BAATZ, *Wehrhaftes Wohnen. Ein befestigter hellenistischer Adelsitz bei Ephyra (Nordgriechenland)*", in «Antike Welt», 30, 1999, pp.151-155; A.J. DOMÍNGUEZ, *Agrarian and Power Landscapes in Epeiros*, cit., pp. 481-482. At the origin of the critic to Dakaris' interpretation as oracular sanctuary D. BAATZ, *Hellenistische Katapulte aus Ephyra (Epirus)*, in «Athenische Mitteilungen», 97, 1982, pp. 211-233.

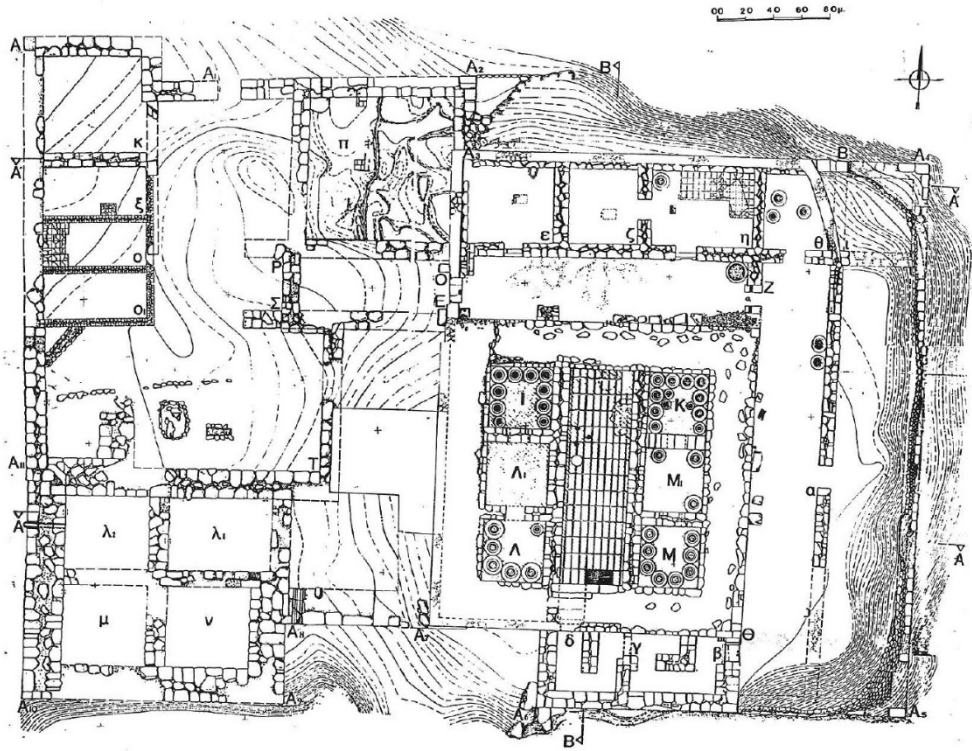


Fig. 3. Mesopotamos (Greece). Plan of the so-called Nekyomanteion (from L. MANCINI, *Edilizia di culto presso gli ethne dell'Epiro*, cit.).

the local élites, even if someone has pointed out some aspects linked to trade routes and re-distribution of resources²².

It is not possible to discuss here the complex issue about the role of the sites, whose establishment seems to be placed in the middle-Hellenistic period (first half of the 3rd/early 2nd century BC), anyway we are interested in the analysis of their evolution in the phase between the Third Macedonian war and the reorganisation of the Epirote region under Augustus.

An interesting case study is that of Malathre which is helpful to shed light on the dynamics touching Epirus in this period. In the Albanian territory, few kilometres to the North from the present-day border with Greece, an impressive

²² For the traditional view see A.J. DOMÍNGUEZ, *Agrarian and Power Landscapes in Epeiros*, cit., pp. 486-487. Some new reflexions are carefully exposed in B. FORSÉN, *Oracle of the dead, farmstead, or trading station? Some thoughts on the interpretation of archaeological remains*, in P. HALINEN, V. HEYD, K. MANNERMAA (edited by), *Oodeja Mikalle, Juhlakirja professori Mika Lavennolle hänen täyttäessään 60 vuotta*, s.l., s.e., 2022, pp. 139-146, part. pp. 141-142 and more explicitly in B. FORSÉN, *Disruption and Development*, cit., pp. 8-11: the focus is on the Nekyomanteion but almost all the considerations can be applied to the other sites.

mountain range stretching South-East to North-West (around 800 m a.s.l.) is cut by the course of the Pavlla river, the main waterway of this area, creating two ridges, the Northern called Mali i Miles, the Southern Mali i Seraqinit. The site of Malathre stands on the gentle slopes to the South of Mali i Miles, facing the floodplain below, which is comprised between the settlements of Butrint (ancient *Bouthrotós*) and Çuka e Ajtoit (presumably ancient *Kestria*), in the region known in literary sources as *Kamma* or *Kestrine* (fig. 4)²³.



Fig. 4. Malathre (Albania). Aerial view of the site, in the background the fortified hill of Çuka e Ajtoit (author's photograph).

The archaeological remains consist of a monumental building which is still preserved up to 6 m in height in some parts. By observing the plan, it is recognisable the original nucleus of the Hellenistic earliest building (fig. 5), which the Albanian excavations in the Eighties dated between the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd century BC, on the basis of the few materials published²⁴.

²³ J. BOGDANI, *ΚΕΣΤΡΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΧΑΟΝΙΑΣ: appunti sulla geografia e storia di una regione di frontiera*, in «Hesperia. Studi sulla Grecità in Occidente», 40, 2022, pp. 87-104.

²⁴ See DH. ÇONDI, *Fortesa – Vilë në Malathre*, in «Iliria. Studime dhe materiale arkeologjike», 14.2, 1984, pp. 131-152; ID., *Banesat e fortifikuara - vila në Kaoni*, cit., pp 21-58. For an updated overview see F. CARBOTTI *et alii*, *Paesaggi d'Epiro*, cit., pp. 120-125.

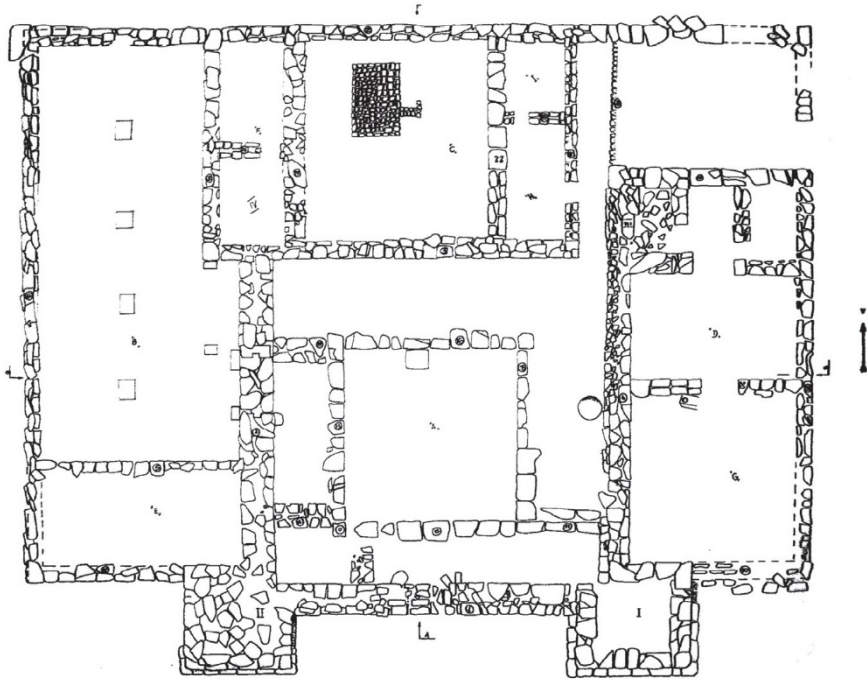


Fig. 5. Malathre (Albania). Plan of the site (from Dh. CONDI, *Banesat e fortifikuara - vila ne Kaoni*, cit.).

This is a *tetrapyrgia*, namely a quadrangular building equipped with four towers jutting out from each corner and it is currently considered as a dwelling of a rich member of the ruling class²⁵. Nonetheless, it is compelling to compare it with the few other examples of this architectural type: nearly all the other documented Hellenistic *tetrapyrgiai* have a military function, such as the fortress of Theangela in Caria and the one at Priniàs in Crete, whose chronology and plan are coherent as well²⁶. Moreover, even if the location on a low hill is not commanding, Malathre could easily control the main route of the valley, located just few meters below, and it is also near the entrance of a gorge which represents the main access to the inland. Reasonably the site of Malathre should be interpreted as a small fortress,

²⁵ J. BOGDANI, *Le residenze rurali della Caonia ellenistica*, cit., pp. 125-126, p. 132, 136; Dh. ÇONDI, *Banesat e fortifikuara - vila në Kaoni*, cit., p. 215.

²⁶ S. RIZZA, *Osservazioni sulla fortezza di Priniàs*, in R. GIGLI (a cura di), *ΜΕΓΑΛΑΙ ΝΗΣΟΙ. Studi dedicati a Giovanni Rizza per il suo ottantesimo compleanno*, Catania, CNR-IBAM, 2005, pp. 211-231. On the topic, with a different perspective focused on the Macedonian context, see F. FERRARA, *Il palazzo fortificato, il tetrapyrgion e il tetragonon schema: fortificazioni ed urbanistica nella tradizione antico macedone*, in L.M. CALIÒ, G.M. GEROGIANNIS, M. KOPSACHEILI (a cura di), *Fortificazioni e società nel Mediterraneo occidentale. Albania e Grecia settentrionale*, Atti del Convegno (Catania-Siracusa 14-16 febbraio 2019), Roma, Quasar 2020, pp. 371-403.

probably connected with the very close Hellenistic settlement of Çuka e Ajtoit, facing it on the opposite side of the valley.

Between the end of the 1st century BC and the beginning of the 1st century AD the building underwent a deep refurbishment, and it expanded outwards beyond the original perimeter, on the eastern, Northern and Western side: two of the four angular towers were dismantled, and several new rooms were created. The result was a larger structure with rectangular shape, lengthened from East to West, whose new dimensions were $36,8 \times 29$ m, remarkably corresponding to 125×100 *pedes*. It is likely that a shift of needs occurred, and it determined an architectural change, but large parts of the previous structure were maintained. Since the strategic function had ceased, and thanks to the favourable location next to the Pavlla river plain, the building was converted into a proper *villa rustica*, as pointed out by findings clearly connected to rural exploitation (fragments of amphoras, *pithoi*, loom-weights and millstones).

Such a dynamic is documented elsewhere in Epirus: the more fitting example is that of Agios Donatos, near the modern Greek village of Zervochori, in the Kokytos valley, where the Thesprotia Expedition of the Finnish Institute at Athens identified the remains of a Hellenistic fortified settlement²⁷. In the late 2nd century BC, a Roman *villa* was built within the walled area, employing also the *opus incertum* and reusing the still-standing tower (fig. 6).

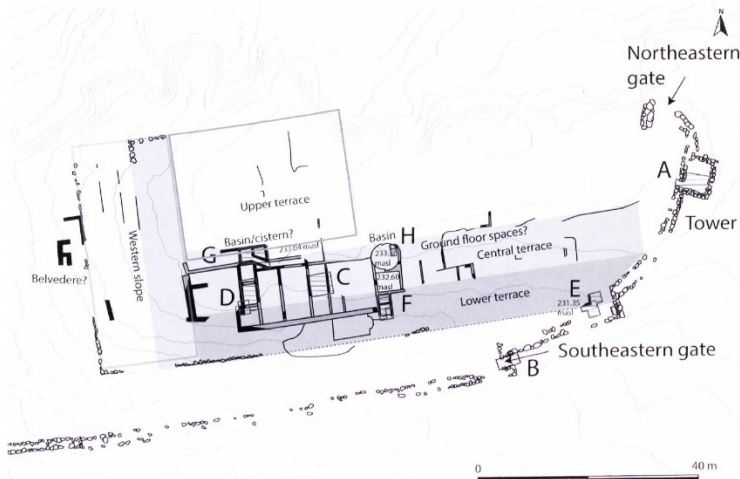


Fig. 6. Zervochori (Greece). Plan of the site of Agios Donatos (from B. FORSÉN, N. GALANIDOU, E. TIKKALA (edited by), *Thesprotia Expedition III*, cit.).

²⁷ M. SUHA, *The Fortification Walls of Agios Donatos*, in B. FORSÉN (edited by), *Thesprotia Expedition I*, cit.; B. FORSÉN et alii, *Catalogue of Sites in the Central Kokytos Valley*, in B. FORSÉN, E. TIKKALA (edited by), *Thesprotia Expedition II*, cit., pp. 109-113 (PS25). The clearly expressed interpretation of the Hellenistic site as «the fortified stronghold of an aristocratic family» (B. FORSÉN, *An Interdisciplinary Odyssey into the Past*, in ID. (edited by), *Thesprotia Expedition I*, cit., p. 13) has been no more proposed and in the following works has been defined more generically as «fortress» or «fortification».

It is noteworthy that several tiles with the stamp *COS* were found during some trial excavations inside the villa, which was hypothetically connected to the *Cossinii* family. It is intriguing to speculate that the producer of the *tegulae* or even the owner of the residence could be a member of the equestrian family, maybe the same *Lucius Cossinius* cited by Varro among the *Synepirotae* (Varro, *Rust.* 2.5.1); with this term the author indirectly refers to the group of Italian landlords who are called to discuss about animal husbandry (*res pecuaria*) in the second chapter of the handbook²⁸. Those men were members of the senatorial and equestrian class involved, as we learn from literary sources, in investing consistent financial capitals in foreign countries in the first half of the 1st century BC. Probably Epirus had been particularly attractive in this sense, first for the reputation of its pastures for livestock²⁹; secondly its position not far from the Italian peninsula and along the East-West trade routes was favourable and, furthermore, it is possible that availability of local slave labour after the end of the Macedonian wars was one of the push factors which drew entrepreneurs’ initiative. Among the Roman aristocrats there was also Titus Pomponius Atticus who had interests in the region and owned an estate around Butrint, as it is known from Cicero’s letters³⁰.

A short overlook on the development of the city and its environs in the period under examination is needed, since, as we will see, the site of Malathre would have been involved in their transformations between the Hellenistic and the Roman period. Ancient *Bouthrotós* is located on a short peninsula dominating a vast lagoon, facing the final part of the Pavlla river valley (Vrina Plain). The top of the hill was settled during the Archaic period, when it probably functioned as an *emporion* connected to the near settlement of Kerkyra³¹. It is not straightforward to determine when a new sanctuary dedicated to Asclepius was built on the Southern slopes of the acropolis and when the lower part of the site was enclosed by a new large stone wall, but thanks to the inscription of dedication of the theatre, we learn

²⁸ B. FORSÉN, *Destruction, Survival and Colonisation*, cit., pp. 237-241; E. GIORGI, *The destruction of Epirus after Pydna*, p. 95.

²⁹ Epirote territory and livestock is glorified by Varro but the tradition of Epirus as a «land of high-quality pastures» («χώρα εὐβοσία») is much earlier, see e.g. ARIST., *HA*, 3.21.12-25 (= 523a) and 7.7-16-22 (= 595b).

³⁰ E.g. CIC., *Att.*, 2.62.2, 4.8.1, 6.3.2. A hypothetical link with Atticus has been proposed about the complex of Diaporit, for which see below in the text.

³¹ N. ALEOTTI *et alii*, *La ripresa degli scavi sull’acropoli di Butrinto. Considerazioni preliminari sullo scavo delle mura arcaiche*, in «Cronache di Archeologia», 41, 2022, pp. 117-142. Some authors have proposed that Butrint was already an independent city, a proper *polis*, already in the Archaic period, a hypothesis mainly based on the mention by Hecateus (FGrH 1 F106 = Steph. Byz., s.v. Ὠρικὸς) and on the reconstruction of a temple dedicated to Athena Polias on the acropolis, see D.R. HERNANDEZ, *Bouthrotos (Butrint) in the Archaic and Classical Periods: The Acropolis and Temple of Athena Polias*, in «Hesperia», 86. 2, 2017, pp. 205-271; *contra* see F. CARBOTTI, *New considerations on the acropolis of Butrint during the Archaic age*, in «Groma. Documenting Archaeology», 6, 2021, pp. 27-46. For a summary on Butrint R. HODGES, *Excavating away the ‘poison’: the topographic history of Butrint, ancient Buthrotum*, in I.L. HANSEN, R. HODGES, S. LEPPARD (edited by), *Butrint 4. The Archaeology and Histories of an Ionian Town*, Oxford-Oakville, Oxbow Books, 2013, pp. 1-21.

that the sanctuary was already in function in the second half of the 3rd century BC³². However, from the following century Butrint experienced a phase of flourishing, probably related to a new federal entity, whose creation in 163 BC was likely promoted by the Romans, for which the sanctuary of Asclepius became the institutional seat³³. The *koinon* of the *Prasaiboi*, even without a real political independence, seems to have lasted until the mid-1st century BC, when first Caesar and then, effectively, after the battle of Actium, Augustus settled a colony³⁴. Unfortunately, the shape of Butrint in the late 2nd/early 1st century BC is largely unknown from the archaeological perspective, also because, in the “lower city”, Hellenistic layers now lie far below the water-table, while we have more information about the Augustan colony thanks to the recent American-Albanian excavations at the *forum*³⁵. Together with the urban architectural development, a functional land re-organisation in the hinterland of Butrint occurred: almost certainly as part of the colonial arrangement, the Vrina plain was divided through the *limitatio*, whose regular scheme was detected by the analysis of a series of historical aerial photographs prior to the deep landscape transformation of the Socialist period³⁶. This process of land division involved the floodplain above which is located the site of Malathre and it is important to highlight the fact that in the same Augustan age the entire building complex was refurbished. In addition, a field survey carried out in 2008 by the Butrint Foundation in the Vrina plain,

³² L. MANCINI, *Edilizia di culto presso gli ethne dell'Epiro. Architettura e paesaggi del sacro alla periferia nord-occidentale della Grecia*, Roma, Quasar, 2021, part. pp. 417-424.

³³ M. MELFI, *Butrinto: da santuario di Asclepio a centro federale*, in G. DE MARINIS *et alii* (a cura di), *I processi formativi ed evolutivi della città in area adriatica*, Oxford, Archaeopress, 2012, pp. 23-30.

³⁴ For an overall view on the Roman colony see R. HODGES, I.L. HANSEN (edited by), *Roman Butrint. An assessment*, Oxford-Oakville, Oxbow Books, 2007. See also I.L. HANSEN, *Between Atticus and Aeneas: the making of a colonial elite at Roman Butrint*, in R.J. SWEETMAN (edited by), *Roman Colonies in the First Century of Their Foundation*, Oxford-Oakville, Oxbow Books, 2011, pp. 85-100.

³⁵ D. HERNANDEZ, *Battling water: the frontiers of archaeological excavations at Butrint (1928-2014)*, in «Annual of the British School at Athens», 112, 2017, pp. 379-412; D. HERNANDEZ, DH. ÇONDI, *The agora and forum at Butrint: a new topography of the ancient urban center*, in J.-L. LAMBOLEY, L. PËRZHITA, A. SKENDERAJ (edited by), *L'Illyrie méridionale et l'Épire dans l'Antiquité*, Actes du VIe colloque international de Tirana (20-23 mai 2015), Paris, De Boccard, 2018, pp. 629-646.

³⁶ D. BESCOBY, *The Roman land organisation of the Butrint hinterland*, in S. GREENSLADE (edited by), *Butrint 6. Excavations on the Vrina Plain. I. The Lost Roman and Byzantine Suburb*, Oxford-Philadelphia, Oxbow Books, 2019, pp. 18-25; V. CASTIGNANI, F. PIZZIMENTI, *Fotografia aerea storica e da drone per lo studio di un contesto lagunare: il caso di Butrinto (Albania)*, in «Archeologia Aerea», 15, 2023, pp. 100-109. Some clues of centuriation were identified also in other parts of the Chaonia region, such as the Vurgu plain near Phoinike and in the Drino valley, see E. GIORGI, *Landscape and Citizens during the Early Roman Era in Northern Epirus: Phoinike and the Chaonia Region (2nd BC-2nd AD)*, in «Groma. Documenting Archaeology», 2, 2017, pp. 6-7 and p. 12; *contra* R. PERNA, *Conclusioni*, in R. PERNA, DH. ÇONDI (edited by), *Hadrianopolis II. Risultati delle indagini archeologiche 2005-2010*, Bari, Edipuglia, 2012, pp. 235-256, part. p. 246, n. 159.

comprehending also the area around Malathre, has revealed a marked increase of sites in the early imperial period³⁷ (fig. 7).

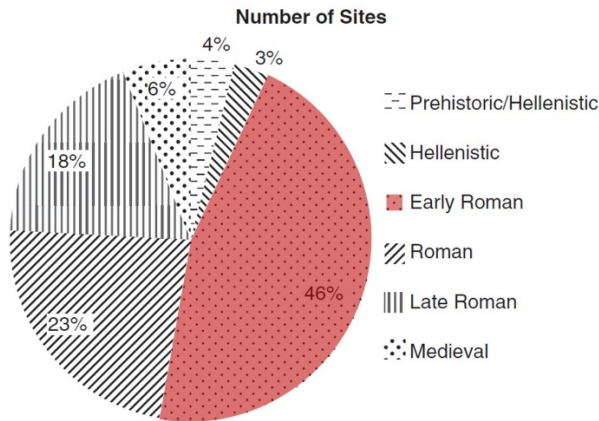


Fig. 7. Pie chart of the Mursi Survey in the Vrina Plain, Albania (from R. HODGES *et alii*, *Beyond Butrint: the 'Mursi Survey'*, cit., with modifications).

The case of the fortified building of Malathre in the environs of ancient *Bouthrotós* offers some hint about the transformations which concerned Epirus during the Roman political expansion in the region. Whatever the function of the facility may have been in the earlier phase, later radical changes in the structure are unquestionable and they are likely to be linked to the establishment of the Augustan colony and the consequent land reorganisation, although, at the moment, available data do not allow to determine the degree of disruption, such as eventual changes in ownership or shifts in land use, unlike other sites as Agios Donatos in Thesprotia, where the arrival of Italian landlords seems more straightforward³⁸. A few kilometres to the North of Malathre, at Diaporit, on the lakeshore in front of Butrint, archaeological excavations have brought to light a complex whose first phase dates back to the late 2nd/early 1st century BC and it has been recognised as an early example of *villa maritima*, which is tantalizing to connect with Atticus' properties³⁹. It is worth noting that the site of Diaporit witnesses the employment of a West-facing architectural vocabulary by wealthy people, maybe those entrepreneurs interested in land exploitation in Epirus, recorded by the Classical writers. Furthermore, some inscriptions datable to the period of the *koinon* of the *Prasaiboi* (approximately from the middle of the 2nd century BC to the middle of the 1st century BC) testify in favour to the presence of individuals of Italian origin: Latin names

³⁷ R. HODGES, E. CARR., A. SEBASTIANI, E. VACCARO, *Beyond Butrint: the 'Mursi Survey'*, 2008, in «Annual of the British School at Athens», 111, 2016, pp. 269-297.

³⁸ Someone has speculated that the rise of broad rural estates marked the turning from “traditional” forms of agriculture into a more intense exploitation, based on large-scale stock breeding: D. BESCOBY, *The Roman land organisation of the Butrint hinterland*, cit., p. 18.

³⁹ W. BOWDEN, L. PÉRZHITA, *The Diaporit Villa in Context*, in D. HERNANDEZ, R. HODGES (edited by), *Butrint 7. Beyond Butrint. Kalivo, Mursi, Çuka e Aitoit, Diaporit and the Vrina Plain. Surveys and Excavations in the Pavllas River Valley, Albania, 1928–2015*, Oxford-Philadelphia, Oxbow Books, 2020, pp. 192-207. Once again, this suggestion is based on the discovery of some tiles with stamps (*ivi*, pp. 195-196).

transliterated in Greek alphabet, such as Αὔλος (*Aulus*), Λεύκιος (*Lucius*), Οὐεργιλία (*Virgilia*), Μάρκος/Μάαρκος (*Marcus*) are attested both among the inscriptions of manumission on the *parodoi* of the theatre inside the sanctuary of Asclepius and among funerary inscriptions in Butrint⁴⁰. Even more interesting is the fact that some of these people have kinship connection with individuals who bear clear Greek names: a man named Ἀφροδίσιος is the son of Μάρκος, while Στραταγίς is the son of Μάαρκος. As it has been pointed out, we do not know whether they were Epirotes adopting Latin names or people coming from the Italian peninsula who settled in Butrint or its environs, but the rather low number compared with the whole and the mixture of Greek and Latin names would suggest an early integration of Italian individuals. However, it should not be surprising, since Polybius recorded the Ἰταλικοὶ ἔμποροι (2.8.2) subjected to the Illyrian raid against Phoinike, few kilometres to the North of Butrint, in 230 BC.

The picture we have tried to outline reflects some aspects of the complex phenomenon that for convenience's sake – and not without strong criticism – it is called “Romanisation”. As for ancient Epirus, the discussion about this topic had to deal with bias linked with modern political issue tied to still-standing recurrence of nationalism, whose impact has not fostered scientific debate⁴¹. For too long research was affected by a black or white perspective, counterposing what seemed to be Roman and what seemed to be local or non-Roman. Archaeological contexts always remind us that reality is more complex, and a wide range of aspects should be considered. In the period under examination the settlement of Roman colonies, as well as the creation of a new “city of the victory”, undoubtedly marked a turning point in the regional history, remodelling the main centres and the rural landscapes throughout a more extensive and systematic agrarian exploitation⁴². But this process has its roots back in time, during the late Hellenistic age, when the Roman political and economic expansion variously affected the region. Continuity and disruption operated together and on different levels through time: sometimes aspects of “Romanisation” are (apparently) easier to detect, as in the cases of Diaporit and Agios Donatos, where new type of building appeared or radically altered what existed before; in other cases, such as Malathre, the evolution followed a different path, determining functional changes concerning productive aspects. As it has been highlighted for urban contexts, they can be interpreted as «dynamic responses to a complex and ever changing political and social situation»⁴³.

⁴⁰ P. CABANES, F. DRINI, *Corpus des inscriptions grecques d'Illyrie méridionale et d'Épire. 2. Inscriptions de Bouthrôtos. Études Épigraphiques, 2.2*, Athènes, Ecole Française, 2007, pp. 261-262.

⁴¹ D.R. HERNANDEZ, *Acculturation (“Romanization”) in Illyria and Epirus*, in «Journal of Roman Archaeology», 31, 2018, pp. 876-882; ID., *Epirus*, in B. BURRELL (edited by), *A Companion to the Archaeology of the Roman Empire. 1*, Hoboken, Wiley-Blackwell, 2024, pp. 346-372, part, pp. 348-350. See also W. BOWDEN, “Alien settlers consisting of Romans”: identity and built environment in the Julio-Claudian foundations of Epirus in the century after Actium, in R.J. SWEETMAN (edited by), *Roman Colonies in the First Century of Their Foundation*, Oxford-Oakville, Oxbow Books, 2011, pp. 101-116.

⁴² B. FORSÉN, *Destruction, Survival and Colonisation*, cit., part. pp. 249-250.

⁴³ W. BOWDEN, *Butrint and Nicopolis: urban planning and the ‘Romanization’ of Greece and Epirus*, in R. HODGES, I.L. HANSEN (edited by), *Roman Butrint. An assessment*, Oxford- Oakville, Oxbow Books, 2007, pp. 189-209, part. p. 190.