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Beiträge für den *Orbis Terrarum* sind einzureichen bei Michael Rathmann, Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Lehrstuhl für Alte Geschichte, Universitätsallee 1, D-85072 Eichstätt, eMail: michael.rathmann@ku.de.

Der Rezensionsteil wird betreut von Anca Dan, Veronica Bucciantini & Frank Daubner. Die Anschriften lauten: Anca Dan, AOROC-CNRS, École Normale Supérieure, 45 rue d'Ulm, F-75005 Paris, eMail: anca-cristina.dan@ens.fr, Veronica Bucciantini, Università degli Studi di Firenze, Dipartimento di Lettere e Filosofia, Via della Pergola 58-60, I-50121 Firenze, eMail: veronica.bucciantini@unifi.it & Frank Daubner, Universität Trier, Fachbereich III, Alte Geschichte, D-54286 Trier, eMail: daubner@uni-trier.de. Um die redaktionellen Arbeiten und das Layout hat sich erneut Natalie Schlirf (NSchlirf@ku.de) verdient gemacht.



# POST-167 BC ROMANS IN CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN RURAL EPIRUS

## ANALYSING A SPECIFIC SETTLEMENT PATTERN

*Vyron Antoniadis*

*Abstract:* Rural sites in Roman Epirus date from the mid-second century BC to the early sixth century AD. The earliest date is established by the aftermath of the battle of Pydna in 168 BC. Sites in Kokytos Valley mark the *terminus ante quem* for the latest date. This paper offers an overview of the Roman rural sites in central and southern Epirus by focusing mainly on the Late Hellenistic and Early Imperial periods and pays particular attention to the Hellenistic rural sites occupied by the Romans. The author argues that Romans after Pydna had a political agenda in settling in rural Epirus and that this process facilitated their rule in this region.

The earliest Roman rural sites, dating from 167 to mid-first century BC, followed a pre-established agricultural and pastoral model. Some of them were easily defensible protected by walls or by natural defences on high and low hills and mountains. This pattern gradually changed from the mid-first century BC to 31 BC with the establishment of wealthy landowners in Epirus. After the foundation of Nicopolis around 29 BC, Augustus transformed the landscape with the centuriation of the Nicopolitan territory. The Romans established all new rural sites south of Nicopolis on a defenceless area without making use of previous structures. This may suggest the beginning of a prosperous era for southern Epirus.

*Keywords:* Roman Epirus, rural sites, Thesprotia, Molossis, Nicopolis.



Map 1. Main Regions and Urban Centres in Central and Southern Epirus in 168 BC.  
Vyron Antoniadis, QGIS, Basemap ASTER.

### 1. Epirus after Pydna<sup>1</sup>

After their victory at the Battle of Pydna in 168 BC, the Romans controlled the entire region of Epirus, from Chaonia in the north to Cassopaia in the south.<sup>2</sup> The term ‘Epirus’ refers to the territories where the main ancient Epirote tribes traditionally dwelt long before the Roman conquest. These are Chaonia, Molossis, Thesprotia, Cassopaia and Ambracia, a former Corinthian colony and capital of the

- 1 I am grateful to Charikleia Papageorgiadou, Sophia Zoumbaki and Anna Kouremenos for their insightful comments and suggestions. I truly appreciate the feedback and corrections offered by the anonymous reviewers.
- 2 Livy 45.34; Polyb. 30.15.

Aeacid monarchs. The successive Roman provinces of Epirus, Epirus Vetus and Nova extended beyond the ancient boundaries of the region. Polybius notes that Romans destroyed 70 walled settlements and enslaved 150.000 Epirotes in 167 BC.<sup>3</sup> Other ancient authors point out the Thracian raids and the Roman Civil Wars as responsible for the devastation of the land in the first century BC.<sup>4</sup> Further, in the late first century BC, Strabo mentions the desolation caused by the rebellious nature of the Epirotes and by the Roman Civil Wars.<sup>5</sup>

Whether he is referring to the period of Augustus or to the previous era is uncertain.<sup>6</sup> It is, however, a much different description from the then vanished Hellenistic fortified cities. Not everything was lost, however. There are testimonies referring to the region as a land of opportunity for pastoral and commercial activities for the Italians.<sup>7</sup> Varro, who died shortly after the foundation of Nicopolis, praises the Epirote slaves, cattle and hounds.<sup>8</sup>

Over the last thirty years, major strides have been made in the archaeological investigation of ancient Epirus. Surveys, rescue excavations and new museums have added a great deal of information about the region. Surveys conducted in the Kokytos and Acheron Valleys, Nicopolis, Bouthrotos (Boutrint), Mursi, Phoinike and Hadrianopolis are important for a large-scale synthesis.<sup>9</sup> No surveys have been carried out so far at Molossis (Central Ancient Epirus), nor in Ambracia. Comparing surveyed and non-surveyed areas could lead to biased data and false assumptions. For this reason, both ALCOCK<sup>10</sup> and BOWDEN<sup>11</sup> have been very cautious on overusing survey data. Rescue excavations conducted more often than systematic excavations can be a solution to this problem. In fact, it is the quantity and quality of these small-scale fieldworks that permit the evaluation of survey results. Rescue

3 Strab. 7.7.3, 7.7.9; Plut. *Aem.* 29.

4 Livy 74, 76; Cass. Dio 30–35.101.2; Cic. *Pis.* 96.

5 Strab. 7.7.9.

6 J. ISAGER, *Eremia in Epirus and the foundation of Nicopolis: Models of civilization in Strabo*, In J. ISAGER (ed.), *Foundation and Destruction, Nikopolis and Northwestern Greece: the Archaeological Evidence for the City Destructions, the Foundation of Nikopolis and the Synoecism*, Athens 2001, p. 17–24.

7 Cic. *Att.* 5.16.1; S. ZOUMBAKI, *Ποιος σαλπάρει από ένα Ιταλικό λιμάνι για να μιλήσει για χοίρους; Διασχίζοντας την Αδριατική προς αναζήτηση ευκαιριών στη Θεσπρωτία*; In G. PLIAKOU / I. CHOULIARAS (eds.), *Thesprotia I, 1st International conference on the archaeology and history of Thesprotia*, Ioannina 2019, p. 375.

8 Varro *Rust.* 1.17.5; 2.1.2; 2.6.16; 2.9.3.

9 J. WISEMAN / K. ZACHOS, *Landscape archaeology in southern Epirus, Greece I, Hesperia, Suppl. 32*, Princeton 2003; B. FORSÉN / E. TIKKALA, *Thesprotia Expedition II. Environment and Settlement Patterns*, Helsinki 2011; E. GIORGI / J. BOGDANI, *Il territorio di Phoinike in Caonia. Archeologia del paesaggio in Albania meridionale*, Bologna 2012; R. PERNA / D. ÇONDI, *Adrianopolis II. Risultati delle indagini archeologiche 2000 – 2010*, Bari 2012; R. HODGES / E. CARR / A. SEBASTIANI / E. VACCARO, *Beyond Butrint: 'The Mursi Survey, 2008'*, In *BSA* 111 (2016) p. 269–97.

10 S. ALCOCK, *Graecia Capta: The landscapes of Roman Greece*, Cambridge 1993, p. 56.

11 W. BOWDEN / L. PÉRZHITA / S. MOORHEAD / P. REYNOLDS, *Archaeology in the landscape of Roman Epirus: preliminary report on the Diaporit excavations, 2002–3*, In *JRA* 17 (2004) p. 415.

excavations occur due to major construction projects, such as the Egnatia Motorway in Northern and Western Greece. An isolated find from a well-excavated context, for example, a Roman farmstead, can trigger a wider investigation in the area. For example, at Kokytos Valley, the local Archaeological Service conducted many rescue excavations. Later, the Finnish Institute of Archaeology re-examined these rural sites with a large-scale survey.<sup>12</sup>

In this paper the term ‘rural site’ refers to structures located in the countryside reserved for agricultural and pastoral activities, or structures of prior different function converted into rural sites. Normally these sites also constituted the residence for at least some of those involved in these activities. Identifying rural sites in Epirus is not a straight-forward process. Excavators have unearthed structures that have been labelled as farmsteads and *villae rusticae*. Yet, there are buildings partly excavated or destroyed in the countryside that could also belong to one of these two categories. The most common category of such unidentified buildings are structures found next to tombs (normally cist graves). These partly excavated structures lack the architectural features of funerary monuments and it is logical to assume that they should be rural domestic sites. In the archaeological record of Epirus, as in other areas of the Roman Empire, this was common, especially in sites dating to the first century AD and later periods. The villa at Zavali, Ladochori at Thesprotia, with its associated graves is such an example.<sup>13</sup> Bath structures found beneath or by Early Christian basilicas might also hint at the location of a villa.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, there are also villas in the countryside and in the coast that lack any agricultural facility, for example at Diaporit, Chaonia.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding the Late Hellenistic and Early Imperial periods, a major point for the present discussion is the function of the walled Hellenistic farmsteads, watchtowers and perhaps of a few former urban centres as rural residences for the first post-167 BC Romans. I attempt to formulate a hypothesis supporting that from 167 BC to around the mid-first century BC, Romans transformed a few of these former urban centres and isolated forts into residential and/or rural sites. The defensive character of these establishments could have facilitated Roman rule in this transitional period before the establishment of the *Pax Romana*. The main tool employed to test this hypothesis is a geographic and archaeological analysis of rural Epirote sites in conjunction with the ancient testimonies referring to Late Hellenistic and Augustan Epirus. This paper focuses on central and southern Epirus, namely the areas of Molossis, Cassopaia, Thesprotia and the territory of Ambracia (Map 1). From Chaonia in Northern Epirus only selected examples will be used in this paper since this area is a part of an ongoing research by the author and also because the Chaonian historical and political context in the period prior to and after 167 BC differs from those in the other Epirote areas. One can see an overview of these rural sites in the

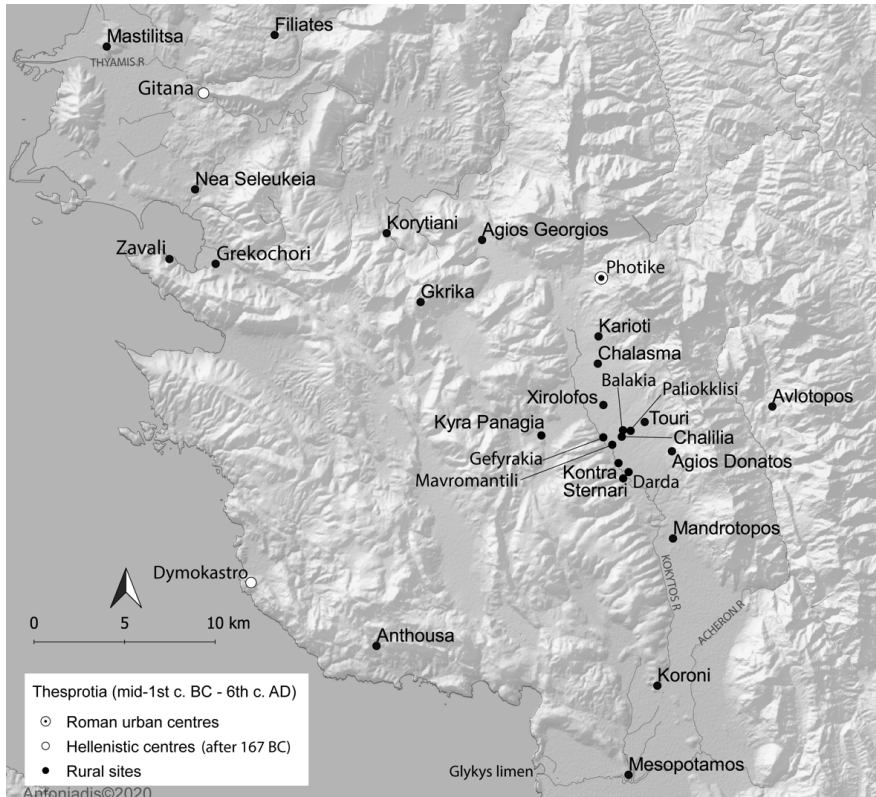
12 See below in the section of Thesprotia.

13 See the presentation of sites in the following sections.

14 W. BOWDEN, *Epirus Vetus: The Archaeology of a Late Antique Province*, London 2003.

15 W. BOWDEN, *Thesprotia in the Context of Roman and Late Antique Epirus*, In B. FORSÉN (ed.), *Thesprotia expedition I: Towards a Regional History*, Helsinki 2009, p. 171.

following three sections that represent these areas, with the addition of Ambracia. In this overview I also include rural sites dating up to the Late Roman period, since some of these are also associated with earlier structures.



Map 2. Roman rural Thesprotia. Vyrion Antoniadis, QGIS, Basemap ASTER.

## 2. Survey of rural sites in Central and Southern Epirus

### Thesprotia (Map 2)

Thesprotia extended from Thyamis River to the north, to Acheron River to the south. Most of the rural sites are located in the fertile valleys of Kokytos and Acheron Rivers and their tributaries. The recovered inscriptions indicate that the Roman colony of Photike<sup>16</sup> was situated near Paramythia. This is the northernmost point of

16 S. DAKARIS, *Cassopaia and the Elean colonies* (Αρχαίες Ελληνικές Πόλεις 4), Athens 1971, p. 201–2; P. SOUSTAL, *Nicopolis und Kephallonia, Tabula Imperii Byzantini III*, Vienna 1981,

Kokytyos Valley sites. From Photike to the mouth of Acheron River at Glykys Limen (Ammoudia) there is a distance of 30 Km through the routes of the valleys.

From Photike to Glykys Limen, is the highest concentration of rural sites.<sup>17</sup> A small unfortified settlement during the Roman Period stood at Karioti.<sup>18</sup> A small village of the Middle to Late Roman Period is reportedly located in Chalasma next to a sixth-century-AD basilica.<sup>19</sup> East of this basilica, another Roman site was found.<sup>20</sup> A small village dating from the fifth to the sixth century AD stood north-east of Xirolofos village.<sup>21</sup> Two contemporary farmsteads were found nearby.<sup>22</sup> There is a small village dating to the Middle and Late Roman periods south-east of Xirolofos, at Balakia.<sup>23</sup> Another farmstead dating to the Middle to Late Roman period and graves with associated coins (fourth-sixth century AD) were also found there.<sup>24</sup> A small village dating to the Hellenistic and Early Roman period was discovered at Chalilia. A Late Roman farmstead stood south-west of the site.<sup>25</sup> Another farmstead dating from the Middle to the Late Roman period lies further south.<sup>26</sup> West of Balakia and Chalilia, a workshop of the Late Hellenistic period stood at Gefyrakia.<sup>27</sup> North of Kyra Panagia, there is a small settlement dating from the Archaic to the Early Roman period. A farmstead dating from the fourth century BC to the fourth century AD was found at Nerotopos. In the same area, Roman potsherds and coins were also found next to a Late Classical/Early Hellenistic village.<sup>28</sup> To the east of Gefyrakia site, a Late Roman/Early Christian village was discovered at

p. 237; D. TRIANTAPHYLLOPOULOS, *Η μεσαιωνική Φωτική και η θέση της στην παλαιά Ήπειρο*, Thessaloniki 1984, p. 587.

- 17 For a presentation of the evidence of Epirus, apart from Chaonia, see V. ANTONIADIS, *Tabula Imperii Romani: J 34 – Athens: Epirus*, Athens 2016.
- 18 I. VOKOTOPOULOU, In *ADelt* 23, Chron. B'2 (1968) p. 286–7; *IBID.*, In *ADelt* 24, Chron. B'2, (1969) p. 249; S. DAKARIS, *Θεσπρωτία*, p. 201; G. RIGINOS, *ADelt* 47, Chron. B'1 (1992) p. 349.
- 19 D. EVANGELIDIS, *Η τρίκογχος βασιλική τῆς Παραμυθιάς*, In *Prakt* (1930) p. 62–5; N. HAMMOND, *Epirus*, p. 738; Dakaris *Θεσπρωτία*, p. 201; B. FORSÉN / J. FORSÉN / K. LAZARI / E. TIKKALA, *Catalogue of sites in Central Kokytyos Valley*, In B. FORSÉN / E. TIKKALA (eds.), *Thesprotia Expedition II. Environment and Settlement Patterns*, Helsinki 2011, p. 76–7, E 18.
- 20 A. CHOREMIS, In *ADelt* 33, Chron. B'1 (1978) p. 223.
- 21 FORSEN ET AL., *Catalogue of sites*, p. 88, PS 10.
- 22 *IBID.*, p. 86–7, PS 14; *IBID.*, p. 87–8, E 7; G. RIGINOS, In *ADelt* 60, Chron. B'1 (2005) p. 579.
- 23 FORSEN ET AL., *Catalogue of sites*, p. 91, PS 32.
- 24 G. RIGINOS, In *ADelt* 60, Chron. B'1 (2005) p. 578; FORSÉN ET AL. *Catalogue of sites*, p. 93, PS 16. G. RIGINOS, In *ADelt* 60, Chron. B'1 (2005) p. 579.
- 25 FORSEN ET AL., *Catalogue of sites*, p. 95–6, PS 38, PS 39.
- 26 *IBID.*, p. 104, PS 40.
- 27 G. RIGINOS, In *ADelt* 56–9, Chron. B'5 (2001–2004) p. 227–8; G. METALLINOU / A. KANTAKITSOU / G. RIGINOS, *ΑΒ' Εφορεία Προϊστορικών και Κλασικών Αρχαιοτήτων*, In M. ANDREADAKI-VLAZAKI (ed.), *2000-2010: Από το ανασκαφικό έργο των Εφορειών Αρχαιοτήτων*, Athens 2012, p. 353.
- 28 G. RIGINOS, In *ADelt* 55, Chron. B'1 (2000) p. 660–1; *IBID.*, In *ADelt* 56–59, Chron. B'5 (2001–2004) p. 264; G. RIGINOS / K. LAZARI, *Ελέα Θεσπρωτίας: Αρχαιολογικός οδηγός του χώρου και της ευρύτερης περιοχής*, Athens 2007, p. 92.



Paliokklisi, south-west of Zervochori. A Late Roman farmstead<sup>29</sup> with associated burials<sup>30</sup> was discovered at Touri.

Further south, a Roman or Late Roman farmstead lies on the site of Mantili or Mavromantili.<sup>31</sup> Another farmstead of Middle to Late Roman date was discovered at Kontra.<sup>32</sup> A farmstead dating from the middle to the beginning of the Late Roman period stood further south at Darda.<sup>33</sup> At Sternari there was a farmstead dating to the Middle/Late Roman period. Graves were found inside and near the building. Domestic pottery, clay loom-weights and coins of the Late Hellenistic and Roman periods were recovered from the area.<sup>34</sup>

An early third century BC fortress stood next to a chapel of Agios Donatos on a spur of the Korylas mountain range between Asfaka and Zervochori.<sup>35</sup> A Roman villa with walls in *opus incertum* dating to the late second/mid-first century BC was constructed above the destroyed Hellenistic wall of this tower. This may be one of the earliest Roman settlements in Epirus.<sup>36</sup> A Roman farmstead was found about 140 m north of the chapel of Agios Donatos.<sup>37</sup> The archaeological finds (terra sigillata ware, fibulae) reveal the reuse of the tower from the first to the third century AD.<sup>38</sup> East of Agios Donatos, at Avlotopos, there is a rectangular building which was used from the fourth century BC to the second century AD.<sup>39</sup>

Further south, at Mandrotopos, there are remains of a building dating from the first to the third century AD. Its final phase dates from the fourth century AD to the sixth century AD.<sup>40</sup> Following the course of Kokytos River to the south, there is another Roman building on Tsoubari hill at Koroni. Its earliest phase dates to the Hellenistic period.<sup>41</sup>

29 G. RIGINOS, In *ADelt* 56-59, Chron. B'5 (2001-2004) p. 289, 307; FORSEN ET AL., *Catalogue of sites*, p. 94, E 4.

30 FORSEN ET AL., *Catalogue of sites*, p. 94, E 4.

31 G. RIGINOS, In *ADelt* 47, Chron. B'1 (1992) p. 361, MAVROMANTILI A; FORSÉN ET AL., *Catalogue of sites*, p. 94-5, E 22.

32 G. RIGINOS, In *ADelt* 56-59, Chron. B'5 (2001-2004) p. 229-30; V. LAMPROU, *Οικιστική οργάνωση του θεσπρωτικού χώρου κατά τη ρωμαϊοκρατία*, In *Epirotika Chronika* 40 (2006) p. 267; D. DROSOY, *Η κατοίκηση στο Θεσπρωτικό χώρο κατά τους βυζαντινούς χρόνους*, In *Epirotika Chronika* 40 (2006) p. 281; FORSÉN ET AL., *Catalogue of sites*, p. 114-5, E 6.

33 G. Riginos, In *ADelt* 56-59, Chron. B'5 (2001-2004) p. 228-9; FORSEN ET AL., *Catalogue of sites*, p. 119, E12; *IBID.*, p. 319-31.

34 G. RIGINOS, In *ADelt* 60, Chron. B'1 (2005) p. 578; *id.*, In *ADelt* 53, Chron. B'2 (1998) p. 545; *IBID.*, In *ADelt* 47, Chron. B'1 (1992) p. 348-9; FORSEN ET AL., *Catalogue of sites*, p. 119-20, E 13.

35 M. SUHA, *The fortification walls of Agios Donatos*, In *Thesprotia Expedition I*, p. 119-32.

36 B. FORSÉN / P. REYNOLDS, *An early closed deposit at the Roman villa of Agios Donatos*, In *Thesprotia Expedition II*, p. 248-64.

37 FORSEN ET AL., *Catalogue of sites*, p. 109, PS 19.

38 *IBID.*, p. 109, PS 25.

39 K. PREKA-ALEXANDRI, *ADelt* 49, Chron. B'1 (1994) p. 427-9.

40 G. RIGINOS, In *ADelt* 60, Chron. B'1 (2005) p. 581.

41 G. RIGINOS, *ΑΓ' Εφορεία Προϊστορικών και Κλασικών Αρχαιοτήτων*, In *Από το ανασκαφικό έργο*, p. 355.