

ABITARE L'EPIRO ANTICO

Tipologie, modelli e trasformazioni
dell'edilizia residenziale
nell'Epiro ellenistico e romano

*a cura di
Julian Bogdani*



All'Insegna del Giglio

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Atti della giornata di studio internazionale
Roma 15 gennaio 2024



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οἶκος δ' αὐτός, εἰ φθογγὴν λάβοι, σαφέστατ' ἂν λέξειεν
— Aesch. Ag., vv. 37-38

A Fabiana, Greta e Sami

The House of the Two Peristyles at Phoinike (Southern Albania). A terraced district between sacred and profane

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Although this contribution is presented as a unified work, the first four paragraphs are attributed to E. Giorgi, while the fifth was written by A. Gamberini. The conclusions were jointly developed by both authors.

Abstract: The House of the Two Peristyles is situated within a terraced district on the southern slope of the hill of *Phoinike*, the capital of Epirus during the Hellenistic period (3-2 cent. BCE). The complex experienced significant development throughout the Roman Imperial period. In scholarly tradition this context has been considered a typical example of a Hellenistic house, following the interpretation of Vitruvius. However, a reassessment of certain categories of finds associated with the sacred sphere, along with an analysis of their spatial distribution within the terrace and the broader urban topography, suggests the possibility of reevaluating the entire architectural complex. This new perspective reveals an interaction between social and religious aspects that may not necessarily be confined to private life.

Keywords: Urban Context, Hellenistic House, Material Culture, Ancient Religion, Busts-*Protomai*.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The *Living in the Town, Living in The Countryside* workshop provided an opportunity to reconsider a context that had already been the subject of research and preliminary studies but had, for some time, remained on the margins of more recent discussions on residential architecture in Epirus. This concerns the so-called House of the Two Peristyles and, more broadly, the terraced district that developed in the Hellenistic period on the southern slopes of the hill of *Phoinike*, the capital city of Epirus, a site that has been the focus of systematic investigations by an Italian-Albanian project for over 25 years (*fig. 1*) (Lepore, and Muka 2023).

Although the excavation of the architectural complex was completed in the early years of the 2000s and the results were promptly presented in preliminary reports in the first three volumes of the series dedicated to *Phoinike* (Çondi *et al.* 2002; Giorgi, and Podini 2003; Giorgi 2003; Giorgi *et al.* 2005; Çondi, and Curci 2005) some aspects remained in the background and required further clarification and in-depth analysis. While a comprehensive reassessment of the entire architectural complex must necessarily be deferred to another venue, we decided to reconsider certain categories of manufacts by reinterpreting them in the light of their discovery



fig. 1. An aerial view of the terraced district with the House of the Two Peristyles (photo: V. Mirto).

context and, in turn, integrating the residential district into the broader urban setting of the city.

This new perspective depends on a research line that has gained traction in Italy through recent studies on the so-called ‘sacred houses’ in Sicily and Magna Graecia, which, in turn, has its roots in the *Lived Ancient Religion* research developed at the Max Weber Center at the University of Erfurt (Portale 2014; Serino 2021). This approach encourages a reconsideration of contexts, emphasising the social and personal dimensions of religious action, based on an in-depth analysis of the interaction between individuals, material culture and topographical spaces.

In our case the innovation does not stem from the acquisition of new artifacts or the opening of new excavations but rather from the reassessment of largely published data, now examined from a fresh perspective. The artifacts considered in this study will be analysed based on their specific topographical context of discovery. As we will see, the interplay between these objects and their spatial settings—first within the house, then the architectural complex, and ultimately the broader cityscape—reveals meanings that may prompt a critical reassessment of the traditional interpretation of the terraced district.

To achieve this objective, we will first describe the topographical context, followed by an analysis of the finds in the most objective manner possible, reserving the formulation of new interpretative hypotheses for the concluding chapter. It is important to underline that this attempt represents only a research trajectory that warrants further exploration and could pave the way for a potential resumption of field investigations, possibly through targeted verification trenches.

THE DISCOVERY AND RESUMPTION OF RESEARCH

As in many other areas of the city, the terraced district that houses the House of the Two Peristyles did not escape the attention of Luigi Maria Ugolini, the archaeologist who was the first to conduct systematic research campaigns on the *Phoinike* hill in the autumns of 1926 and 1927 (De Maria 2002; Carrieri 2023). On this occasion, a survey of the archaeological remains was carried out alongside a topographical survey by Dario Roversi Monaco. Ugolini identified the terraces of the Hellenistic district but misinterpreted them as part of the defensive system (Ugolini 1932, 49, fig. 29). Between 1989 and 1991, the area was excavated by a team of Albanian archaeologists led by Astrit Nanaj, with the assistance of Dhimitër Çondi, who identified a residential structure organized around two peristyles of different size (Çondi *et al.* 2002, 63-67). Between 2000 and 2003, research resumed with new stratigraphic investigations in the House of the Two Peristyles and in the terraced district as part of the renewed Italian-Albanian project, then directed by Sandro De Maria and Shpresa Gjongecaj. The 'House of the Two Peristyles' was analysed by Sandro De Maria and Sidi Gorica, who proposed a functional interpretation based on a rereading of the well-known Vitruvian passage describing the Greek house of the Hellenistic period (*De Architectura* VI 7, 1-5). This led to the distinction of the two main sectors of the house: the *andronitis*, dedicated to the male sphere and structured around the larger peristyle, and the *gynaeconitis*, designated for activities associated with the female sphere and developed around the smaller peristyle (De Maria, and Gorica 2012). Since then, the architectural complex has generally been regarded as an example of a prestigious Epirote residence from the Hellenistic-Roman period. However, in light of a recent reassessment of its topographical location, architectural development, and some specific material categories, we consider that the entire context requires reconsideration (Giorgi, and Gamberini 2023).

TOPOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The House of the Two Peristyles derives its name from the two porticoed courtyards around which it is structured. The architectural complex is situated within a terraced district built during the Hellenistic period on the southern slope of the *Phoinike* hill, which overlooks the valley of the Bistrica River, in the hinterland of the ancient port of *Onchesmos* (modern Saranda). The residential district was developed alongside the theatre, the Western Agora, and the eastern stoa during a phase of major urban expansion, when *Phoinike* served as the principal city of the *Koinon* of the Epirotes and the fortification walls were also extended¹.

¹ The expansion of the city walls took place west of the eastern sector of the hill, where the earliest fortifications are preserved. However, no structures related to the city's oldest core have been found to date, as this sector has been heavily impacted by modern construction activities (Giorgi, and Bogdani 2012, 82-89; Gamberini 2018a; Giorgi, and Lepore 2020, 154-163). Regarding the terminology of public areas, the classification used here follows the most recent publication, thus adopting the terms "Eastern Agora" (previously referred to as the "Ancient Agora" in Rinaldi 2020, 29-35) and "Western Agora" (formerly called the "New Agora" in Rinaldi 2020, 35-46, and the "Middle Hellenistic Agora" in Mancini 2021, 391); Lepore, and Muka 2023, 15-17; 85-107.

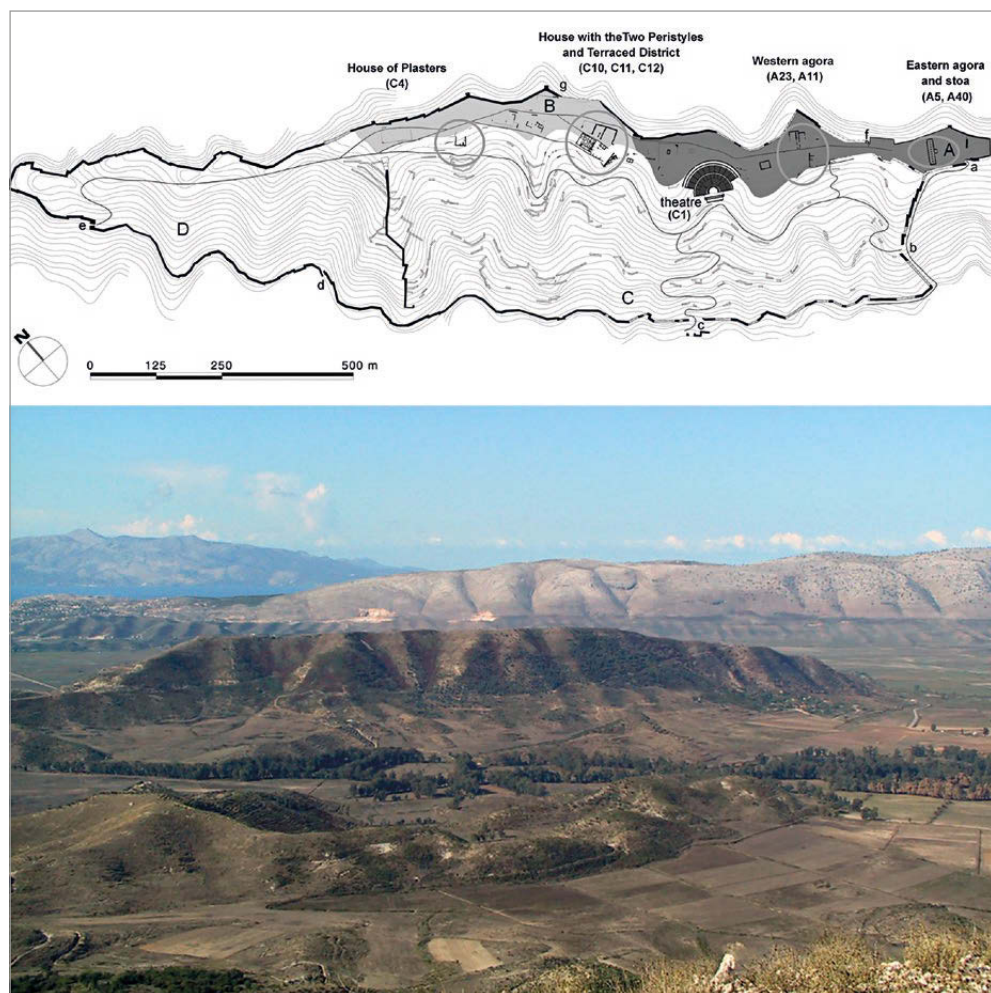


fig. 2. Top: city plan (after Rinaldi 2020, re-elaboration); bottom: The hill of Phoinike seen from north.

The terraced district is located north-west of the theatre, to which it was connected by a road, and below the city's main street, which ran along the summit plateau of the hill (fig. 2). These two parallel urban roads—one ridge-top and the other mid-slope—were linked by ramps that facilitated movement between different elevations. One such passageway is a narrow *ambitus* to the southeast of the house, which divides the district into two distinct sections: the House of the Two Peristyles to the north and Terrace S to the south (fig. 3). This division was functional, mainly serving the drainage of water, and did not imply a real separation between the two areas. In the Hellenistic period, Terrace S would appear to have been an open space devoid of structures and therefore ancillary to the neighbouring buildings.

The Terrace S, built in the Hellenistic period within the terraced quarter, was extended in the Roman period for the construction of a large multi-level building,

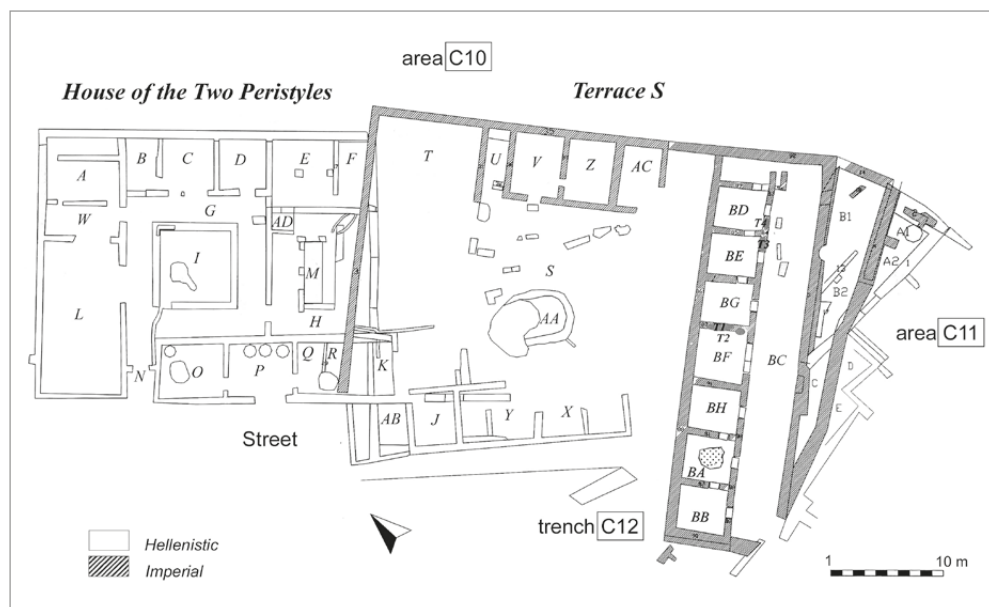


fig. 3. Plan of the Terraced District (C10, C11, C12), after Giorgi *et al.* 2005, fig. 3.1.

which encroached upon part of the House of the Two Peristyles. This new structure extended north-eastward, covering the ancient *ambitus* and partially overlaying the smaller peristyle. Despite this modification, the House of the Two Peristyles remained in use throughout the Roman period, although the smaller peristyle was remodelled.

MAIN CONSTRUCTION PHASES

As previously mentioned, the terraces on which the entire residential district stands were built in *opus pseudo-isodomum* during the period of major Hellenistic development (late 3rd-early 2nd century BCE) as part of a broader urban planning initiative. The area was prepared within a framework of public urban organization, which also included the expansion of the city walls, preliminary to the construction of the structures that were built there. The House of the Two Peristyles was built subsequently, developing across three levels: the lower one facing the street and the main level, which included an attic, as indicated by the discovery of Ionic semi-columns.

On the northeastern side of the larger peristyle, a sequence of three reception rooms is arranged, two of which (C, B) are interconnected and paved in *opus signinum*, and their walls, still partially preserved in the lower sections, were originally decorated with painted plaster². During a later construction phase, three additional rooms (O, P, Q) were created at the lower level, functioning as storage spaces accessible directly

² This is a sequence known as *Dreiraumgruppe* (Portale 2008, 247-248; in general: Hoepfner 1996). The current planimetric development of these rooms belongs to the last building phase and later remodelling can be seen. Room D is independently accessible from the main peristyle. The central room (C) opens onto the peristyle (G) with a wide threshold made of stone blocks interrupted by an almost central pillar and communicates with the adjoining room (B) by means of two openings,

from the street through an opening on the front of the central room (*fig. 3*). The residence, which underwent modifications during the Early Imperial Roman period, preserved its main shape during its final phase in Late Antiquity (3rd-4th century CE). During the Early Imperial period, a large architectural complex was built at the expense of part of the House of the Two Peristyles. This new structure, developed on multiple levels, occupied the entire southeastern sector of the Hellenistic residence (Terrace S). The new building used the Hellenistic retaining wall as its lower boundary and continued the usage of a large cistern (AA), which had already been positioned at the centre of the vast open area during the Hellenistic period. However, this construction covered many previous smaller terraces, of which only a few structures remain visible along the southeastern edge of the new building (C11), on the south-eastern side opposite the House of the Two Peristyles.

The architectural remains of the Roman complex are quite poorly preserved, but evidence suggests the presence of a *cryptoporticus* that supported the terrace on the south-eastern side, consisting of a sequence of seven square rooms opening onto an adjacent corridor. The collapse of the upper floor yielded elements of what was likely a colonnade and several fragments of statues, including an Artemis, now exhibited at the Butrint Museum, a first-century CE copy of a Classical original (Mercuri 2005, 191, De Maria, and Mercuri 2007, 164-165).

The overall layout of the complex presents several interpretative challenges due to the poor preservation of the main level, which appears to have been largely occupied by an open area surrounding the cistern. The sequence of poorly preserved rooms on the northeastern side, difficult to date, is interrupted by a staircase, which may indicate the continuation of the structure on the upper terrace, an area that remains unexplored. Consequently, there is a strong possibility that the known portion of this building represents only the forecourt of a more extensive complex that may have extended further uphill.

[E.G.]

MATERIAL CULTURE AND POSSIBLE TRACES OF THE SACRED

The finds recovered during the excavation of the area have been analysed on several occasions. However, these studies have often involved a strong quantitative selection, with an interpretative focus almost exclusively on chronological data—necessary for identifying the phases of occupation of this district—primarily derived from the study of coins and pottery³.

The analysis of artifacts, for instance, has allowed to trace human activity in the area preceding its construction. The earliest evidence of occupation consists of a small yet

one of which is plugged. The plaster is preserved for just over a meter and shows red and ochre fields separated by a dark band with traces of plant decorations (Giorgi, and Podini 2003, 25).

³ In total, around 300 finds have been published out of the more than 7,000 discovered. See in particular the contributions by Federica Boschi, Dhimitër Çondi, and Anna Gamberini in the preliminary reports (Çondi *et al.* 2002, 85-91; Boschi 2003; Giorgi *et al.* 2005, 46-50); specifically, on the materials from the layers of room L: Gamberini 2009, with revised dating in Gamberini 2018a. Fine pottery from the Hellenistic period has also been included in the monographic work dedicated to the subject (Gamberini 2016). Production indicators are edited in Gamberini 2018b.

significant number of artifacts dating as far back as the 5th century BCE⁴. The study of the pottery has established that the terraces were constructed between the last decades of the 3rd century and the early 2nd century BCE, based on the analysis of one of the few intact stratigraphic contexts: the accumulated soil used to level the slope where Room L was later built. Similarly, the discovery of matching ceramic fragments in two separate rooms (O and Y) has helped to date to the Augustan period the enlargement of Terrace S, which encroached upon part of the structures of the House of the Two Peristyles (Gamberini 2016, 99, cat. 223).

While chronological analysis requires further refinement, the focus of this workshop has led us to explore other issues, particularly concerning the function of this complex across its various phases of use, from the Middle Hellenistic period to Late Antiquity. The first data emerging from the examination of previously overlooked artifacts encourage a reflection in this direction. Since we have not yet completed the overall analysis of the stratigraphy and we hope to be able to study them in greater depth in a dedicated monographic work, we present them here on a preliminary basis.

Among the most noteworthy finds are thin, quadrangular terracotta plaques with one side decorated in relief, depicting a female bust with arms crossed over the chest, identified as *Busts-protomai*. At least five fragments of these plaques have been discovered in the area, mainly from the southeastern sector of the House of the Two Peristyles (Terrace S), where Hellenistic structures were later incorporated into the construction of an imposing two-story building, erected, as mentioned, in the Augustan period. The fragments belong to at least three different plaques of varying dimensions: one preserves almost the entire face, measuring approximately 2×3 cm; another depicts a face missing the lower portion and is roughly twice the size of the first; the third fragment, preserved at approximately 34×40 cm, includes a right arm resting on the chest, belonging to a significantly larger figure than the other two. These artifacts were recovered from rooms BC and BH—one of the rooms in the *cryptoporticus* along the southeastern side of the terrace and the adjoining corridor—as well as from the area of the street bordering the terrace itself (*fig. 4*)⁵.

Due to their fragmentary state, identification of these finds was possible only by comparison with other significant discoveries made in the northern sector of the Western Agora, published by Lorenzo Mancini (2021, 391-94). In that case, four *Busts-protomai* with raised forearms were found in a fragmentary state within a fissure in the bedrock, inside the levelling fill used to build the agora. The scholar proposed a dating

⁴ The 5th century BCE is represented both by figured pottery, such as the fragment of an Attic bell-shaped krater (inv. 04/1881: Gamberini 2016, 134, footnote 122; Baldoni in Lepore, and Muka 2023, 187, cat. 6), and black-gloss vessels, such as the fragments of a stemless cup and an Attic skyphos type A (inv. 04/1971 and inv. 04/1737, respectively: Gamberini 2016, 134). The 4th century is testified by some Corinthian type skyphoi (Gamberini 2016, cat. 49, 52, 54), a saltcellar (Gamberini 2016, cat. 269), as well as some coins minted in Macedonia by Philip II (Gjongecaj in De Maria, and Gjongecaj 2005, cat. 4) and Alexander the Great (Gjongecaj in De Maria, and Gjongecaj 2002, cat. 1, 2), in Molossia (Gjongecaj in De Maria, and Gjongecaj 2002, cat. 36), in Kassope (Gjongecaj in De Maria, and Gjongecaj 2002, cat. 37, 39) and in Corcyra (Gjongecaj in De Maria, and Gjongecaj 2002 cat. 272).

⁵ These are: inv. 03/2598 ('b' in *fig. 4*) and 03/3388, both from room BC, 04/2028 (room BH): in the absence of photographic and graphic documentation, they were recognised on the basis of their description in the database and we cannot exclude that another fragment from the same room BH, whose description is less precise, may refer to a protome bust rather than to a *Tanagra* figurine, also present in the area. From the excavation of the road come also the only two fragments drawn: 02/1688 (head: 'a' in *fig. 4*) and 01/937, from the trench C12, significantly larger than the others ('c' in *fig. 4*).

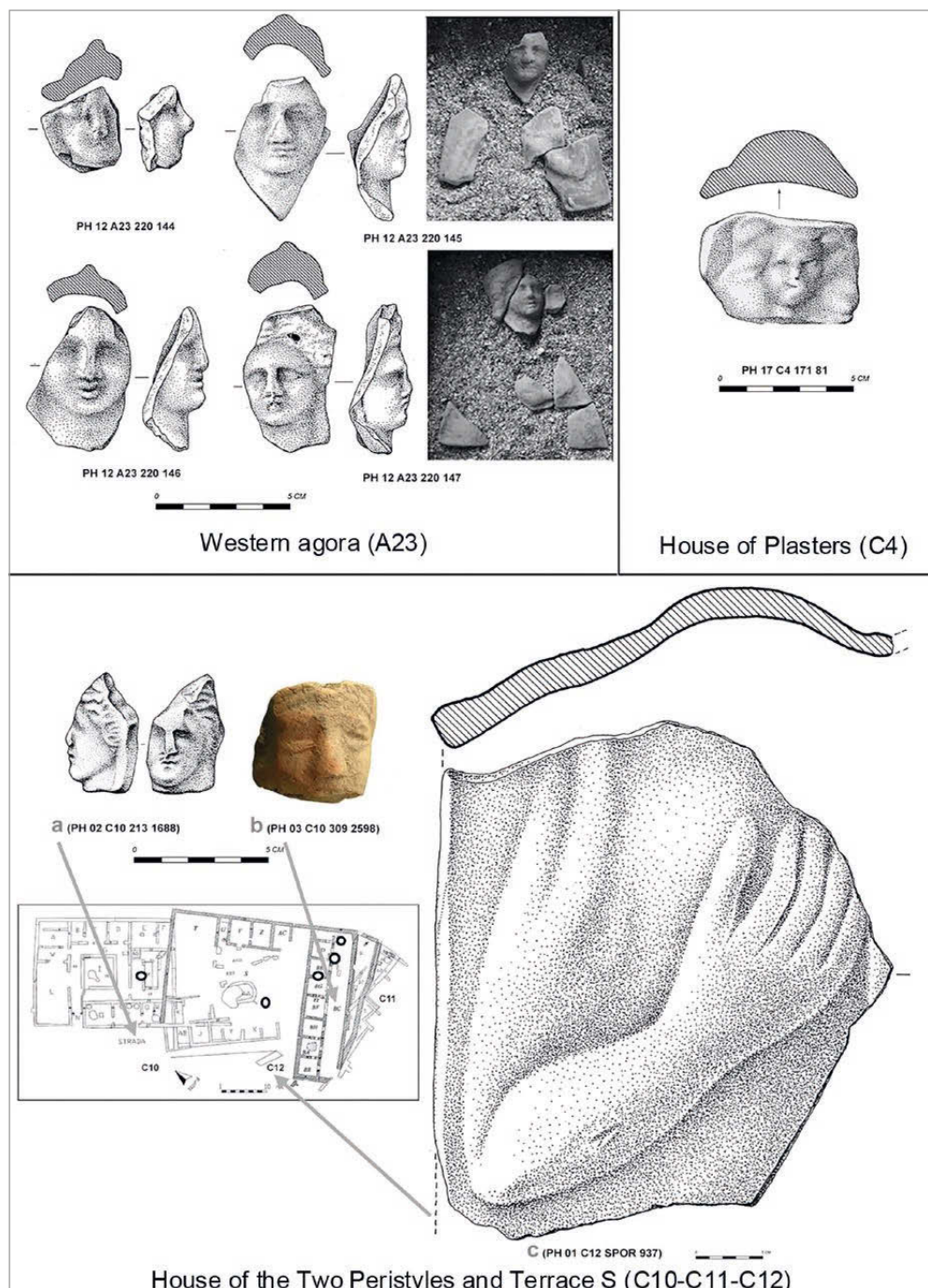


fig. 4. Busts-Protomai from the Western Agora (A23, top left), from the Plaster House (A4, top right) and from the Terraced District (C10, C12: bottom). Drawings by I. Zaloshnja.

to the Early Hellenistic period and a connection with the cult of Artemis. Although it has been demonstrated that these Busts-*protomai* generally represent the dedicator rather than a deity, his hypothesis is based on the strong resemblance between the *Phoinike* Busts-*protomai* and those found in the Artemision of Dautaj near Durrës, and the numerous attestations of Artemis' cult in *Phoinike* (De Maria, and Mercuri 2007) and the broader region (Mancini 2021, 389-395).

The deposition of the Busts-*protomai* found in the agora appears to be the result of a ritual act associated with the abandonment or restructuring of a pre-existing sacred area, likely located on the eastern sector of the hill, at the margins of the original settlement nucleus. This peripheral placement aligns with the liminal nature of this type of ritual⁶. According to a well-known study on votive coroplasts from Taranto and the Greek world in general by Enzo Lippolis, the dedication of Busts-*protomai* is linked, regardless of whether they represent a specific deity or the worshippers themselves, to rites of passage, marking transitions from childhood to adolescence, from adolescence to marriage, or from life to the afterlife (Lippolis 2001, 238).

The fragments of Terrace S cannot be interpreted as a votive deposit, as they were discovered in secondary deposition, in surface layers or in stratigraphic contexts containing mixed materials from both the Hellenistic and Early Imperial periods. Furthermore, these cannot be directly linked to the presence of a sanctuary, nor do they lead one to refer the structures of the terraced district to such a context. Nevertheless, as votive objects, they remain indicative of ritual gestures and actions that took place in the area.

It is well established that Busts-*protomai* appear in sanctuary, funerary, and domestic contexts, as also highlighted in a 2006 study on the 'bâtiment à protomés' of Tragilos and the Thracian and Macedonian sphere. In that case, the building was interpreted as a domestic structure due to the limited number of Busts-*protomai* found (four complete and three fragmentary) and their association with objects related to female activities, such as loom weights, shears, and pottery for food preparation and consumption. According to the author, these protomes were likely hung in the *gynaeceum*, the section of the house dedicated to female activities—some even exhibit suspension holes—and may have represented either generic female deities or the women of the household themselves (Chryssanthaki-Nagle 2006, 12; 21-29).

For the case of *Phoinike*, the stratigraphic situation does not allow us to determine which objects were directly associated with these protomes. The presence of loom weights, as well as vessels for food storage and cooking, is well documented throughout the area, particularly in the rooms located along the southern and western sides of the complex. While these finds certainly indicate the performance of female-associated activities, they cannot be directly linked to the presence of protomes nor used to determine the function of specific rooms.

The presence of the cistern (AA) at the centre of Terrace S, at first interpreted as functional to the possible performance of craft activities in the southern rooms of the

⁶ Mancini 2021, 391-393. A more cautious interpretation, suggesting a possible association of these Busts-*protomai* with a sanctuary of Athena, has recently been proposed by Francesca D'Ambola in Carbotti *et al.* 2024, 78-80.



fig. 5. Top: Horizontal sima with lion-head spout, from the oikos building in the Southern Necropolis; bottom: fragment of sima from the AA cistern fill (mirrored to the right to facilitate comparison). Drawings by I. Zaloshnja; re-elaboration by A. Gamberini.

terrace⁷, might instead, in light of the *Busts-protomai*, be interpreted as an indicator of ritual practices that, as is well known, often required the use of water. As we will discuss in the concluding section, such activities could be understood within the framework of the inherently “fluid” nature of ancient ritual practice and the possibility that this context corresponds to those spaces that were “almost never entirely private, yet not fully public either,” commonly associated with nymphal rituals (Portale 2014, 117; Serino 2021, 38).

Although the cistern was not fully excavated due to structural stability concerns, the discovery of an architectural decorative element within its fill, datable to the first century BCE, suggests its abandonment during the early Roman period and, more importantly, indicates its use during the Hellenistic period, as corroborated by its alignment with the Hellenistic structures. The element belongs to the edge of

⁷ A hypothesis proposed by Federica Boschi, based on the finding of some production markers (Giorgi *et al.*, 46-50), whose number we suggest here to reduce (a fragment of matrix for a relief cup and two vitrified fragments). If it is likely that in the city there existed a pottery production workshop, as other elements demonstrate (Gamberini 2018b), these elements do not seem to be enough to place it in this context: the same reference to one of the workshops of the so-called House of the Officer of Morgantina, from the 3rd century BC, is also unconvincing due to the chronological gap: the elements recalled above are dated to the 2nd century BC, while the rooms within which they were found were built in the Imperial age.

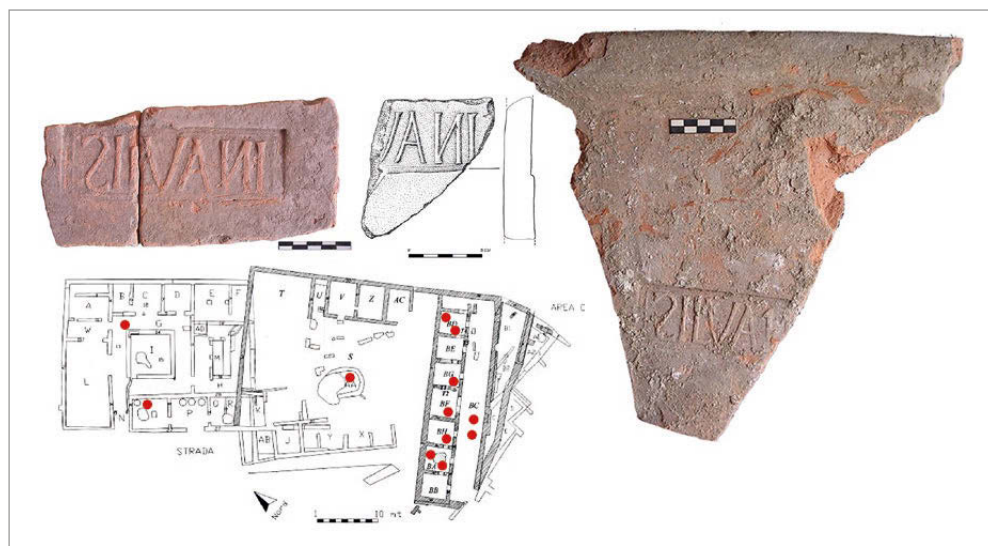


fig. 6. Evidence of the tiles with the stamp ZILVAII in the area of the Terraced District. Drawings by I. Zaloshnja.

a terracotta slab, beneath which a partially preserved volute extends from a missing projecting element, of which only a curved outline remains⁸.

The fragment is comparable to a horizontal *sima* with a lion-head waterspout that decorated the roof of a small temple found at the foot of the hill, in the city's Southern Necropolis, dated to the first century BCE (fig. 5) (Lepore, and Belfiori 2019, 85-87). Notably, fragments of similar spouts have been discovered in association with other buildings at the summit of the hill, all of which are public⁹. If this architectural element belonged to a structure of the Early Imperial period located in this area, its roofing elements could further reinforce the hypothesis that the entire complex, at least from the Early Imperial period onward, had an important (and possibly sacred) function that cannot be explained exclusively in terms of private use, an idea already suggested by the discovery of certain statuary furnishings from the upper floor of the nearby *cryptoporticus*, particularly the previously mentioned statue of Artemis, found in Room BF (De Maria, and Mercuri 2007, 170).

Additional evidence from the roofing material introduces another intriguing aspect: numerous fragments of roof tiles were found, which, according to chemical and mineralogical analyses of their fabric, were produced locally or regionally (Gamberini 2008, 46; Minguzzi, Nannetti, and Zantedeschi 2008). These tiles bear the stamp ZILVAII (Silvani), with the letters "S" and "N" inverted, inscribed within a rectangular cartouche (fig. 6)¹⁰.

⁸ Inv. 01/3488. Another fragment very similar to this one was found inside room BB.

⁹ These are a fragment found in the eastern sector of the city (A40), five fragments found in the western agora (two in the northern sector A23 and three in the southern sector A11), and a fragment from the area of the Late Antique thermal building A20.

¹⁰ These consist of 12 fragments found the House of the Two Peristyles (north of peristyle I and in room O) and in Terrace S (cistern AA, rooms BA, BC, BD, BE, BG, BH).

This stamp has no known parallels, either in the Epirote region or elsewhere, and within *Phoinike* itself, it has been documented solely in this context. The genitive form of the name *Silvani* could indicate the name of the owner of the workshop, the name of the commissioner, or even serve as a chronological marker by referencing a magistrate¹¹. Although *Silvanus* is a common name, with several attestations found on *opus dolia* stamps dating between the 2nd century BCE and the 2nd century CE¹², it is also worth exploring the possibility that it refers to the deity *Silvanus*, since the use of the genitive alone to denote a deity is widely attested, even though never mentioning this specific god¹³. In any case, the stamps would not necessarily indicate the sacred nature of the building in which the tiles were placed: there is also the possibility that the workshop that produced the tiles was located near a sanctuary dedicated to that deity (Manacorda 2020, 139, n. 117).

If the last case is true, both the workshop and the associated sacred area would need to be identified either in *Phoinike* or within its surroundings, based on the aforementioned archaeometric analyses and the diffusion of this stamp exclusively in this context. This topic needs to be further investigated, as well as the hypothesis that, given the distribution of tiles with this stamp in the area, the roof could be unique for the two buildings.

[A.G.]

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS FOR A REASSESSMENT OF THE TERRACED DISTRICT

As mentioned in the introductory section, recent studies have brought our attention towards certain urban contexts of Sicily and Magna Graecia from the Classical period that have traditionally been interpreted as private dwellings in which, as already observed for the Hellenistic period, traces referable to the private sacred sphere can be discerned. These traces, in some cases, have given rise to the doubt that the use of these spaces for worship may have transcended the domestic space to become part of a wider area of contact and almost negotiation between extended family ties and the wider community of citizens.

Such complexes have been effectively defined as ‘neighbourhood sanctuaries’ or ‘sacred houses’ (Serino 2021, 42-43, n. 32), often associated with cults connected to rites of passage, such as the transition to adulthood of young individuals and women (Portale 2014).

¹¹ On the significance of brick stamps between the Hellenistic and Late Antique periods, see Manacorda 2020, 127-143. On this specific stamp, see the contribution of Bjorn Forsén in this volume.

¹² The consultation of the online database *Opus doliare signatum: Database of Brick Stamps from Rome, Ostia, and Central Italy. Lateres Project* has so far allowed the identification of the following stamps: *Novum CIL XI 8106/7.1* (a rectangular stamp in three lines naming the consul *M. Plautius Silvanus*, dated to the first half of the 2nd century BCE). *CIL XV 1031*, dated to the mid-2nd century CE. *Novum CIL XV S. 242/896.2* (a circular stamp bearing the name *L. Caecili Silvani*, dated to the 1st century CE). *CIL XV 570*, where the name *Aelius Silvanus* appears, dated between the late Trajan and early Hadrian periods.

¹³ For the Italian context, reference should be made to a relatively recent study on *sacred tiles*, which examines various case studies (Granino Cecere, and Marengo 2012). Although the name *Silvanus* never appears in that study, the attested forms include divine names in the nominative or genitive, sometimes with the addition of *SACRA*; the name of a city or an ethnic designation with the addition of *SACRA*; and, finally, the deity's name in the dative along with the name of a private individual in the genitive.

In this regard, such sanctuaries would have played a cohesive role in reinforcing communal bonds, ensuring the continuity of the *genos*, while simultaneously strengthening the foundations of the civic community—especially considering the profound interconnection between citizenship and religion in the ancient world. The challenge of identifying these functions remains complex, as they were often performed within buildings typologically identical to the domestic ones. Furthermore, in many cases, including the one under study, it is the new interpretive sensitivity that allows us to recognize these sacred markers—often overlooked at the time of excavation and thus requiring retrospective identification.

The underlying methodology is based on the identification of specific archaeological indicators that provide evidence of religious practices, which might otherwise be indistinguishable from other remains documented during excavation. Archaeology allows us, in fact, to reconstruct the gestures behind the tangible traces of the sacred that we find in the excavations (see also Lepore in this volume).

Among the key elements characterizing this ‘religious stratigraphy’, whose identification may justify an interpretation beyond the strictly domestic one, are: the spatial positioning within the urban fabric, the architectural characteristics and spatial configuration including areas that could have served community functions, the distribution of objects associated with sacred functions, and the presence of water reserves necessary for ritual practices. These factors can help determine whether certain traces of the sacred—potentially linked to private or individual rites—might instead indicate cultic activities accessible to at least a segment of the civic body.

In light of these considerations, we can turn to the House of the Two Peristyles in *Phoinike* and the broader context of the terraced district to assess whether there is room for a critical reassessment.

From a topographical perspective, the *House of the Two Peristyles* was established in the Hellenistic period (late 3rd-early 2nd century BCE) in a significant sector of the urban layout. It occupies a terrace situated between the city’s main street—running along the ridge above, leading towards the *agora*—and the mid-slope roadway that headed to the theater district. The terrace was constructed using pseudo-isodomic trapezoidal masonry prior to the development of the residential quarter, employing building techniques similar to those found in contemporary public structures, such as the western *agora*, the eastern *stoa*, and especially the Hellenistic fortifications (Giorgi, and Lepore 2020; Rinaldi 2020; 29-46; Giorgi, and Bogdani 2012, 75-78). The architectural plan features living spaces opening onto a large peristyle, which is reduplicated in a reduced form by a secondary, smaller peristyle, surmounted by an attic level. If a more private space was present, it might have been located on the upper floor, while several ground-floor rooms appear well-suited for representational functions or banqueting, as suggested by the three rooms situated along the northeastern side of the main peristyle¹⁴. Finally, the presence of a cistern on the nearby Terrace S,

¹⁴ On the organisation of the Greek house in the Hellenistic period and the development of reception rooms, see Pesando 1987, 175-197; Lippolis 2017, respectively.

already in use during the Hellenistic period, could have fulfilled the essential role of water collection for ritual activities.

Based on these reflections—grounded in evidence that does not lend itself to unequivocal interpretation and in the absence of decisive elements—various interpretative hypotheses may be considered. Rather than proposing a definitive reassessment, the aim is to stimulate renewed scholarly interest in this Hellenistic-Roman complex.

Regarding the Hellenistic period, a preliminary hypothesis suggests that the House of the Two Peristyles may have been the residence of a high-ranking individual involved in the political life of the Epirote capital during the time of the *Koinon* of the epirotes (234-168 BCE). Its strategic location within the city, combined with the presence of spaces designated for both the private sphere—including areas associated with *sacra*—and the public or, at the very least, socially representative domain (such as the paved rooms opening onto the larger peristyle), supports this interpretation. Adjacent to the house existed an unroofed area centred around a cistern, which does not appear to be identifiable as a domestic structure and was separated from the residence by an *ambitus*. Despite this separation, which could be overcome by means of openings along the perimeter walls, the discovery of Busts-*protomai* in both areas (fig. 4) suggests the possibility that the two buildings were, in fact, part of a single architectural complex, functionally linked and utilized for the performance of transitional rites. In this scenario, the ensemble would represent a ‘sacred house’ flanked by an open space with auxiliary ritual functions (Serino 2021, 64).

During the early Imperial period, no substantial planimetric modifications are evident in the House of the Two Peristyles, except for the significant transformation that affected Terrace S. This terrace underwent considerable expansion along its southern limit through the construction of a *cryptoporticus*, as well as along its northern boundary, encroaching upon the southern perimeter of the House of the Two Peristyles and thereby reducing the size of its smaller peristyle. This major alteration necessitated at least a partial reconstruction of the roofing system: roof tiles stamped with the ΣΙΛVΑΙΙ mark—produced in a local or regional workshop—were installed on the roofs of both buildings. This evidence could indicate a unified conceptualization of the newly configured complex. However, the poor preservation of the long dividing wall prevents us from determining whether, and where, any thresholds facilitating communication between the two structures may have existed.

At present, it is also impossible to ascertain the precise nature of the ΣΙΛVΑΙΙ stamp—whether it denotes a manufacturer’s mark, a reference to the patron of the construction, or, ultimately, a possible allusion to the well-known Latin deity *Silvanus*, as already argued.

Another crucial element to consider is the access to Terrace S. Due to the severe deterioration of the southern corner of the complex, it is not possible to reconstruct its relationship with the adjacent mid-slope roadway. We can only assume a possible connecting ramp to the west of the Hellenistic structures J, Y, X. Alternatively, if the two buildings were functionally linked, access may have been provided via the ramp of the House of the Two Peristyles (N), but this scenario would be conceivable

only if the entire complex was a unified architectural entity—either a *domus publica* or a residence belonging to a family capable of managing private, public, and representational spaces.

Regardless of the exact relationship between the two buildings, several indicators support the hypothesis of a public function for the porticoed structure on Terrace S. Notably, the high quality of its roofing system, as evidenced by fragments of *simae* with waterspout traces, finds close parallels in architectural elements recovered from a small temple in the Southern Necropolis—an unequivocally sacred context—as well as from other public areas of the city. Unfortunately, the poor preservation of the upper floor of the *cryptoporticus* significantly limits our understanding of the structure. However, the discovery within its spaces of *crustae* of marble and fragmentary statues—including the frequently mentioned statue of Artemis—suggests a representational function, further emphasized by the prominent topographical location of Terrace S and the spectacular effect enhanced by the *cryptoporticus* itself. In this regard, it is worth noting that the construction techniques employed in the earliest phase of the *cryptoporticus* closely resemble those of the city's principal public complex, namely the southern sector of the western *agora*, which was refurbished during the early Imperial period (A11) (Lepore, and Muka 2023, 32).

Another limitation to our understanding—though one that could potentially be resolved through further investigations—is our incomplete knowledge of the overall plan of the complex, which may have extended further uphill in a scenically dominant position along the ridge road, the city's main road. Though entirely hypothetical, it is not inconceivable that the porticoed building functioned as an entrance system or forecourt to a yet unknown upper complex. In this case, its functions might have been merely ancillary to those of a larger, more significant structure.

From this perspective, only renewed fieldwork can provide further clarity—an endeavor that, we hope, this study may help to stimulate.

[E.G., A.G.]

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ABITARE L'EPIRO ANTICO

Il volume presenta gli atti della giornata di studi *Living in the Town, Living in the Countryside. Typologies, Models and Transformations of Residential Architecture in Hellenistic and Roman Epirus*, svoltasi presso Sapienza Università di Roma il 15 gennaio 2025. I contributi qui raccolti affrontano, con un approccio multidisciplinare, il tema dell'edilizia residenziale nell'Epiro antico, con particolare attenzione alla regione della Caonia, corrispondente all'odierna Albania meridionale, e con aperture alle aree limitrofe. Ne emerge un quadro articolato e aggiornato delle tipologie, dei modelli dell'abitare in età ellenistica e le loro trasformazioni in età romana, alla luce delle più recenti indagini archeologiche e delle nuove prospettive di ricerca.

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nell'Epiro ellenistico e romano

a cura di
Julian Bogdani



All'Insegna del Giglio