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*Landscape and Citizens during the early Roman era in Northern Epirus: Phoinike and the Chaonia region (2<sup>nd</sup> BC-2<sup>nd</sup> AD)*

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# Landscape and Citizens during the early Roman era in Northern Epirus: Phoinike and the Chaonia region (2<sup>nd</sup> BC–2<sup>nd</sup> AD)

*For a long time the study of the landscape of Chaonia (northern region of Epirus) under Roman rule has been focused essentially on the territory of Butrint, while the wider studies of this region have often favoured the Hellenistic age. The research of the last few years has opened up new study perspectives that have allowed us to re-evaluate the development of cities such as Phoinike, Bouthrotum, Hadrianopolis and their territories in the Roman age. Similar historical parallels can also be seen in other sites nearby. At the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD some important developments took place in urban areas and in the surrounding landscape, when it comes to, for example, the viability and the agricultural infrastructures. These dynamics were part of important changes that took place after the end of the Macedonian wars in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, and possibly even before, when Rome first got interested in this area of peripheral Greece in the last decades of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.*

## Introduction

The evolution of Roman cities in Chaonia (the Northern Region of Epirus, in Albania) was often underestimated and the studies were essentially based on the case of Butrint, the ancient Bouthrotum. This site had been the object of greater attention since the last century, thanks to the archaeological investigations of the first Italian Mission (1928–1944). The importance of the remains of a Roman colony, as well as political reasons, made the archaeology of Roman Butrint very attractive for the Italian culture in that period. More recently, some International Research Projects, in agreement with Albanian archaeologists, have contributed to the development of our understanding of this very remarkable place<sup>1</sup>.

Apart from Butrint, there was a tendency to focus in this region on more ancient times, when the Illyrian and Epirotian cultures flourished. This trend has led to a consequent underestimation of the Roman era and favoured the diffusion of the idea of a substantial decline. In the case of ancient Antigonea in the Drinos valley, destroyed at the end of the last Macedonian wars, this thesis was confirmed by a less careful reading of the ancient historiographical tradition. Nevertheless we know that the destructions and deportations, to which the Epirots were subjected by the Romans after their defeat in the

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<sup>1</sup> In Butrint, the British and then the American Archaeological Mission were active but in 2015 a new Italian–Albanian research project was activated. See: Ugolini 1937; Bowden 2003; Hodges 2006; Hansen, Hodges 2007; Melfi 2007; Hansen, Hodges, Leppard 2013; Hernandez 2017a; Hernandez 2017b; Giorgi, Muka 2018.

battle of Pydna (168 BC), in some regions – like in Chaonia – represent almost a literary topos, not always supported by archaeological data<sup>2</sup>.

In recent times some studies have tried to overcome this interpretation, also thanks to new field research projects<sup>3</sup>. The new archaeological surveys and a more careful analysis of the historiographical tradition have helped to clarify the different destiny that the various regions of Epirus had. The transition to Roman rule is actually marked by destructions in Molossia and partially in Thesprotia, but it is characterized instead by a substantial continuity in terms of settlement in Chaonia<sup>4</sup>.

Many recent studies have freed us from the examination of the Hellenistic Age and allowed us to focus on Roman Chaonia, where the cities of Phoinike, Hadrianopolis and Buthrotum were located<sup>5</sup>. The following considerations will mainly be based on the analysis of the case of Phoinike, with a summary and preliminary comparisons with Buthrotum and Hadrianopolis. We will try to focus our attention on a few research themes in an extremely preliminary manner, with the purpose of presenting the problems, rather than the solutions. The only aim is to indicate possible research to be developed in the future.

## Phoinike

The archaeological research at Phoinike is still in progress, thanks to the Italian and Albanian Project directed from 2000 by Sandro De Maria and Shpresa Gjongecaj<sup>6</sup>. Also in this site the excavations were started by Luigi Maria Ugolini in the last century (1926–1927), before moving to Bouthrotum<sup>7</sup>. The ancient town of Phoinike sat on the peak, a long and narrow plateau, and on the slopes of a hill that looked out over the valley of the Bistrice river. The urban center, arising most likely at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, was a flourishing city between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC<sup>8</sup>. Then it



Fig. 1. Map of Northern Epirus with the main Towns (Giorgi, Bogdani 2012)

<sup>2</sup> Budina 1993; Cabanes 2007; Perna 2014, 209–214. For a synthesis concerning the rest of the Greece see Alcock 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Giorgi, Bogdani 2012; Hansen, Hodges, Leppard 2013; Sphuza 2016; Perna 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Forsén, Tikkala 2011; Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, 115–117, 402–414; Perna 2014, 209–242.

<sup>5</sup> In these sites research projects are currently going on by Italian Archaeological Missions in agreement with the Institute of Archeology of Tiran, involving the University of Bologna at *Phoinike* and at Butrint and the University of Macerata at *Hadrianopolis* in the Drinos Valley. For a summary see: Gjongecaj 2011; Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, 355–395; Melfi, Piccinini 2012; Perna 2012; De Maria 2012; Podini 2014; De Maria 2015; Gamberini 2016; Perna 2014; Lepore 2017.

<sup>6</sup> The Italian Archaeological Mission of the University of Bologna at *Phoinike* is now directed by Giuseppe Lepore and by Shpresa Gjongecaj for the Institute of Archaeology of Tiran.

<sup>7</sup> Lepore 2015.

<sup>8</sup> De Maria 2015.

enjoyed a substantial continuity of life until the late medieval period when Venetians and Turks were fighting for control of this site and its territory. This complex and layered history has led to some difficulties in reconstructing, on a strictly archaeological basis, all of this city's historic phases. If one considers the use of this site for military reasons until the last century, Phoinike represents in many ways a case of real urban archaeology. In fact, as in many cities with continuous inhabitants, some periods of great historic importance are, archaeologically speaking, not well or not at all preserved, because these phases were consumed by the successive occupations of this area. The easternmost part of the hill (the acropolis), for example, was profoundly affected by the medieval constructions and was destroyed by the trenches and bunkers of militaries in the last decades of the last century, so much so that today all that is left of the ancient Hellenistic-Roman town are the imposing ruins of the city walls. Also the area of the agora was majorly modified by the layout of the medieval basilica and by military structures. Taking into consideration all of these difficulties, it is still possible to try to outline a synthesis of the Roman phase of Phoinike.

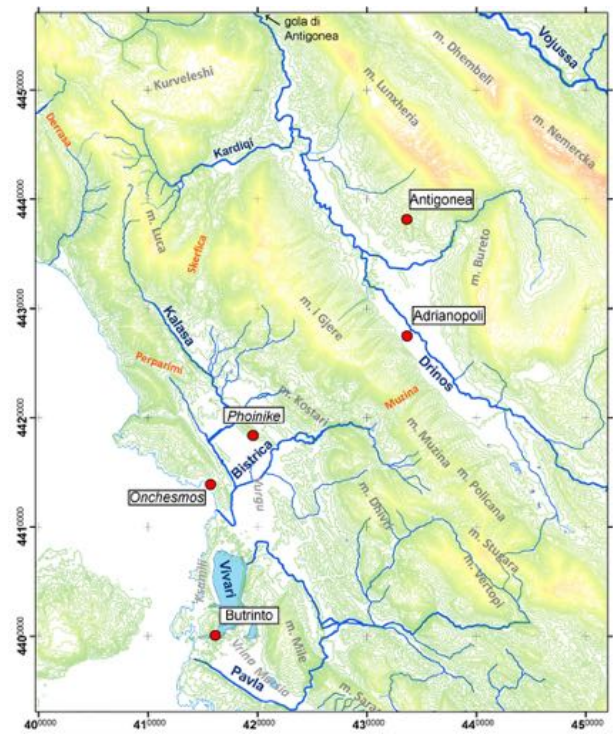


Fig. 2. Topographical Map of Chaonia Region with the main Rivers and Towns (Giorgi, Bogdani 2012)



Fig. 3. The Hill of Phoinike viewed from the South-West side (Giorgi, Bogdani 2012)

such as the Hellenistic cistern in the area of the acropolis, which was completely redone in the Roman era, or the remains of a likely thermal system just above the cavea of the Theater.

Luigi Ugolini believed that most of the Roman city developed in the plains at the foot of the hill where the current village of Finiqi is located, in the so-called low city (*città bassa*). Here some massive brick walls, traditionally attributed to the late Roman imperial age, have survived. This interpretation was supported by the literary sources as well. In fact, according to Procopius's historiography, only during

In previous studies, the impact of urban development in the Roman Age was often underestimated, so much so that over time it came to be believed that a substantial decline occurred in comparison with the peak reached in the Hellenistic period.

Furthermore, after the digs by the Italian archaeologist Luigi Maria Ugolini on the hill of Phoinike, in the 1920s, only a few public buildings were recognized as belonging to the Roman era<sup>9</sup>. They were mostly structures regarding functions,

<sup>9</sup> Ugolini 1932.



Fig. 4. The Valley of the Bistrica River, near Phoinike, towards the Vivari Lake with Corfu Island in the background (Giorgi, Bogdani 2012)

the time of Justinian would there be a new and important rebuilding on the summit of the hill of Finiqi (De aedificiis IV 1, 37-39)<sup>10</sup>. Instead, prior to that the Roman city coincided with the low city.

As we will see, both archaeology and a closer analysis of the historiography tradition allow us to re-evaluate this interpretation. In this sense, what needs to be reconsidered is not so much the tendency to fortify cities on the highest hilltop in the Middle Ages, justified by the historical-environmental factors of that era and not contradicted by archaeological remains, but rather the abandonment of the hill in the Roman era. The archaeology of Phoinike, in fact, shows a substantial continuity of life in the upper city even after the development of the lower city<sup>11</sup>.

### *The upper city*

The recent investigations led by the Italian-Albanian mission on the hill of Phoinike, starting at the beginning of this century and still ongoing today, show a continuous urban development which,

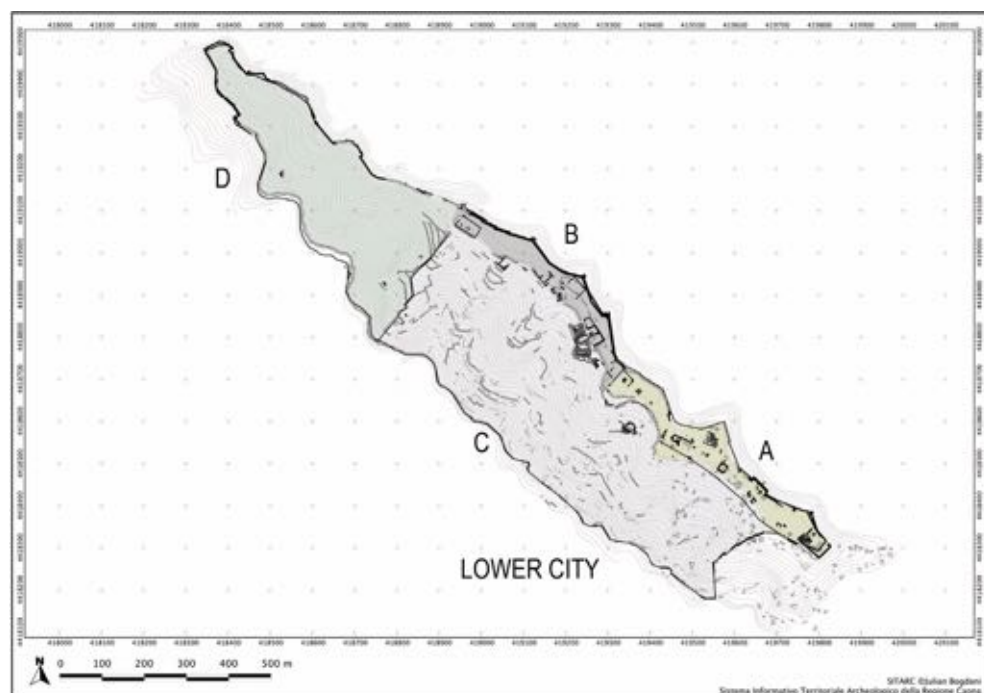


Fig. 5. Map of the Hilltop of Phoinike with the acropolis (A) and its extension on the north-west side (B), the slope with the Hellenistic and Roman Houses (C), and the euechorion (D). (Giorgi, Bogdani 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Bowden 2006, 277-286.

<sup>11</sup> Bogdani 2011; Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, 29-114.

from the late Hellenistic age, continues into the Roman era. We are not speaking only of continued habitation in the structures built during the Hellenistic era, but also of important remodeling phases and even new buildings including some of the most significant monuments of the city. In the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, for example, the Agora was almost completely remodeled. The most recent digs and most of the ongoing ones show evidence of imposing retaining walls, with a clear expansion of the urban layout, which extend into the lower part of the plain of the Agora. Preliminarily, and with all the caution to be expected when considering digs and studies that are still ongoing, it would seem that this system was developed in two construction phases during the Roman Empire, when this place became the Forum of the Roman town. Furthermore, by the mid 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, another building called Edificio a portico was built in the terraced neighborhood where there was also the Hellenistic house with two peristyles (Casa dei due peristili), which was also totally remodeled. The same building (Edificio a portico), where the statue of Artemide was also discovered, collapsed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD but it was immediately rebuilt and continued to be used until the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. The entire terraced area appears to have been constantly developed over various building phases which continued throughout the entire Hellenistic–Roman era. In conclusion we can cite the case of the great Theater of Phoinike, which was also erected in the Hellenistic era (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC) but extensively remodeled in the mid-imperial Roman era (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD). Without going into more detail, but limiting our discussion to just the previously mentioned building complexes, we can see the outline of a substantial continuity between the Hellenistic and Roman Ages for the entire central area of the hill. We must instead examine the lack of information regarding the easternmost part of the acropolis and in the western area of the hill<sup>12</sup>.

In the first case, the lack of information mostly regards all of the phases in antiquity and could be due for the most part to the “consumption” of the Middle Ages. In fact, various surveys repetitively done in this area have always shown very compromised stratigraphies by the subsequent removals in this area. This fact seems to be confirmed both by the digs carried out by Ugolini, and in those begun by us in the first phases of the investigation, as well as more recently following new geophysics investigations which allowed for further stratigraphic results during the 2013 and 2014 campaigns in the central sector<sup>13</sup>. Nevertheless, other more recent research, done on the eastern summit of the hill plain near to the area called *laurus nobilis* and along the slope immediately under it, shows many significant architectural elements, sometimes also writings, which would appear to belong to destroyed ancient buildings located in the same area<sup>14</sup>. Along with these elements we must add sections of walls made with big stone blocks (between the so called *laurus nobilis* and Grande Bastione) which can be traced to the genetic phase of this settlement<sup>15</sup>. Lastly we must consider the complex and articulate modern military structures that in a very evident manner destroyed the ancient archaeological deposit. Certainly, these are for the most part *ex silentio* reasonings. Nonetheless some clues, even if they are fleeting, would lead us to think that a Hellenistic phase was present also in the eastern part of the hill plain.

Obviously in these cases it is important not to stop at the archaeological data but to also keep in mind other historical and geographical considerations. It is enough to consider the morphology of the hill to verify that the eastern section shows a natural conformation particularly suited to defence and has exceptionally favourable strategic characteristics for controlling this territory. In the end, the decision

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<sup>12</sup> Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, 118–120; Cirelli 2015; Giorgi 2015; Villicich 2015; De Maria, Bogdani, Giorgi 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Boschi, Silani 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Giorgi, Lepore 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, 75–79.

to return to fortifying this place in the early Middle Ages, and then again in the modern area by the Albanian military, represents an indirect confirmation of this hypothesis.

The second case, the case of the westernmost area, is quite the opposite as it seems that the stratigraphic deposit is both whole and that the most superficial colluvium rests directly on the remains of the terraced structures from the Hellenistic era, while, at least in its current state, there are no evident phases of Roman construction. For now, this is what has been found within a section of investigations where a dig is being carried out on a second terrace with another Hellenistic house, but it could be representative of a wider area, more or less corresponding to the euechorion of the Hellenistic city.

In extreme brevity, as far as the hill of Phoinike is to be considered, even if it is with a few simplifications and while awaiting new research, we can hypothesize a substantial continuity of life for the eastern and central areas of the hill, that is to say the area of the city which more or less corresponds to the acropolis, the widening of the acropolis and to the corresponding upper part of the hill slope (sectors A, B, C of Ugolini). We can instead assume that the euechorion was totally or partially abandoned, and was located in the westernmost area of the hill (sector D)<sup>16</sup>.

### *The lower city*

If the need to reevaluate the Roman phase in the area of the hill of Phoinike, traditionally defined as the upper city (*città alta*), is thus undeniable, the development in the Roman era of the lower city (*città bassa*) also cannot be denied, at the foot of the hill near the current village of Finiqii. As we noted before, in this area some long brick walls have been found partially destroyed by the recent unconditional expansion here. These structures are now conserved in distant nuclei but clearly refer to a rational urban system conceived in the mid-imperial Roman era. These structures can be further placed in a system of terraced and orthogonal blocks organized on the edges of a street oriented similarly to the one that still runs along the foot of the hill from the northwest to the southeast<sup>17</sup>.

On the western limit of Finiqi the Hellenistic necropolis can be found. In this area the graves seem to become so rare that they almost disappeared during the Roman era, when however a little temple was constructed facing the main road. This road, directed towards the valley of the Theater, seems to be part of the same rational organization of the urban space shown by the other brick walls of the lower city. Two other orthogonal roads complete the urban organization of this area of the necropolis<sup>18</sup>. The archaeological deposits brought to light here have shown how these street axes were set up on a small incline that covers a previous Hellenistic phase. These increases in altitude continue between the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and they represent successive levels of reclamation. As we will see, also the road axes seem to be part of a wider system of infrastructure in this area in line with the expanding of the urban layout of the lower city.

### *Roads and centuriation*

Roman centuriation is a system of regular division of fields for agricultural and cadastral reasons, different from the organization of urban space. In some cases urban planning and agricultural organization follow the same orientation (*constituendorum limitum ratio pulcherrima*), but the measurements of the *insulae* in the town and of the *centuriae* in the surrounding landscape are considerably different. The

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<sup>16</sup> De Maria 2015, 90.

<sup>17</sup> Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, 142.

<sup>18</sup> Lepore 2017.

coinciding of urban and cadastral orientation is possible only in favourable geographic circumstances, such as in plain areas with a coherent hydrographic network. The conservation of field divisions is conditioned by subsequent geographic changes, in the countryside more than in urban space, and often survives only in historical maps. In the low plain areas and near the rivers, often the Roman soil is covered by floods that obliterate the centurion. In these cases, only a few parts can survive in the most elevated areas near the hills. Sometimes the channels belonging to centurion were re-activated in the Middle Ages, starting from the preserved parts, because they were still useful for drainage even if they no longer had cadastral functions<sup>19</sup>.

The studies carried out in the areas surrounding Phoinike have led to the hypothesis of a wide centuriation in the valley around the hill, which can be reconstructed thanks to the analyses of the historic maps of the Istituto Geografico Militare Italiano<sup>20</sup>. The elements allowing for said reconstruction are not many, but in my opinion they are significant. For example, the rational division of the inhabited areas found with archaeology in the area of Finiqi are compatible with some of the trends in ancient hydrography which appear to conserve the regular grids of Roman centuria. These orientations remain coherent even if there is a considerable distance between them. We must, however, recognize that the natural tendency of the plain of Finiqi to become marshy has led to flooding also in modern times. These floods largely concealed the ancient paleo-soils, making any kind of reconstruction difficult without careful geophysical, geomorphologic, and paleo-environmental investigations before the archaeological ones. Lastly, modern agriculture in this area has substantially erased the few remaining traces of the ancient landscape. For this reason, the study of this area is possible only on the basis of historic cartography and still has many interpretative difficulties. The archaeological data provided by the cited stratigraphic investigations of the southern Necropolis would thus seem to be of the utmost importance<sup>21</sup>.

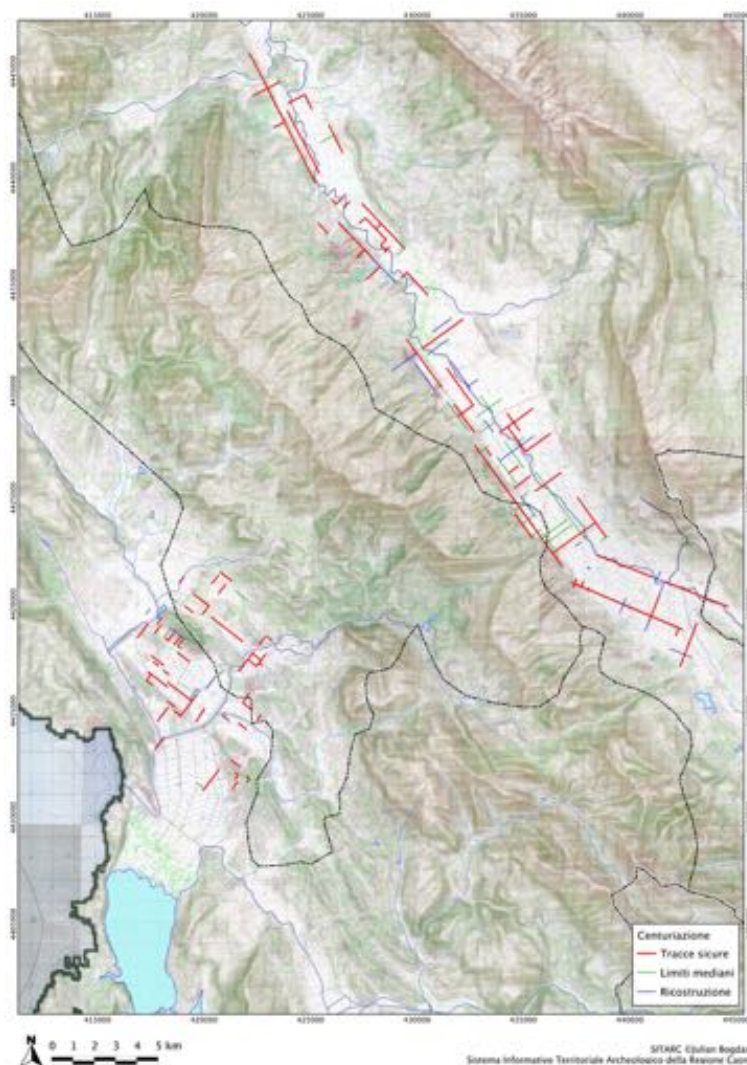


Fig. 6. Map of the main remains of the Roman centuriation (red lines) in the territories of Phoinike and Hadrianopolis (Giorgi, Bogdani 2012)

<sup>19</sup> Franceschelli 2015, 187-190; Rosada, Dall'Aglio 2009; Dall'Aglio 2009; Campagnoli, Giorgi 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Giorgi 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, 125-129.



In any case, the full reading of the archaeological data, in particular those deduced from the investigation in the area of the southern necropolis, combined with historical and geographic considerations, could lead to the recognition of an early system of agricultural division in the Augustan era, which was then revived and expanded in the mid-imperial era. Thanks to the *limitatio* and the *centuriatum* of the Roman era, and to the structuring of an efficient system of superficial draining, large portions of the territory, previously areas of standing water and swamps, were then used for agriculture.

As part of this regularization of the countryside, also roads were created. The road that runs along the foot of the hill, along which the modern village of Finiqi has developed, is closely based on the ancient road axis. It is a section of the detour of the *via Egnatia* that connected Aulona to the north with Buthrotum and Nikopolis to the south, as noted also in the *Itinerarium Antonini* (324, 4), for the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, and in the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (VII, 3), for the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. According to a recent hypothesis, the street identified near the southern necropolis could instead be part of the network of roads that connected with the port of Onchesmos (Sarandë). All of these itineraries branch out in the territory connecting to many other important roads going towards the upper city<sup>22</sup>.

### *Roman Phoinike*

In conclusion of this in depth examination of Phoinike in the Roman era, we can take note of some points for consideration:

1. The upper city is characterized by a substantial continuity of life in the passage between the end of the Hellenistic era and the Roman era.
2. In the Roman era, the urban expansion of the lower city at the foot of the hill took place as part of a system of orthogonal terraces without compromising the development of the upper city.
3. The orthogonal road axes of the lower city are part of a wider remodeling of the infrastructures of this territory that included centuriation and the connection with the regional road system.

Along with these considerations we can also add some insights to the chronology:

1. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, when many Epirote regions suffered the consequences of the Roman victory in Pydna, research on the hill of Phoinike does not show a cessation but rather a substantial continuity in terms of habitation.
2. In the Roman era two important phases of construction and remodeling of the infrastructure of this area can be identified in the early and mid imperial age.

### *The nearby areas*

The important research carried out by other archaeological missions in the valley of the Drinos and in the Vivari lake basin allow us to attempt to form an overall idea by taking into consideration the other two Roman centers of Chaonia, Hadrianopolis and Buthrotum<sup>23</sup>.

In fact, even without going into detail, some interesting similarities in the developmental dynamics of these sites in the Roman era can be seen. There are also, of course, some significant differences, which make the historic parabola of each urban experience unique. Nonetheless, I believe that these points could be very useful in better understanding the evolution of Chaonia in the Roman Age.

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<sup>22</sup> Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, 129-136.

<sup>23</sup> De Maria 2012.

## Buthrotum

As we have previously mentioned, several research projects have been carried out at Butrint. After the Italian Archaeological Mission directed by Luigi Maria Ugolini (1928–1936), Pirro Marconi (1939–1944) and Dario Mustilli (1939–1944), we have to remember the Project directed by Richard Hodges with the Butrint Foundation (1993–2012) and the Roman Forum Excavation Project directed by David Ray Hernandez and Dhimiter Çondi (2004–2014). Afterwards there were excavations of Albanian archeologists, such as Neritan Ceka, and now a new Albanian and Italian Project is ongoing<sup>24</sup>.

In Buthrotum the passage from the late Hellenistic into the Roman Age is characterized by a substantial growth with significant changes. There was a progress of the urban shape, first in the public buildings, linked to the allocation of new Roman citizens: the city (*urbs*) grew and the citizenship (*civitas*) changed. During this time the ancient Epirotic Town, once an emporium of Corcyra, became a Roman city. Butrint was connected also on a literary level to the history of the birth of Rome, thanks to the myth of Aeneas, to justify the presence of an elite of Roman citizens (Verg. *Aen.* 3.349–51)<sup>25</sup>. The well-known happenings at the end of the late Republican era (2<sup>nd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> BC), which brought important Roman economic interests to this area up until the time of the Augustan colony, facilitated urban development. We know the story of the colonial deduction thanks to the correspondence between Cicero and Pomponius Atticus, who was a great grand lord and the patron of the city (*Att.* 16.16a). He managed to avoid the colony until the death of Caesar. But, despite the efforts, there was a first colonization (44 BC) and a few years later the city was refunded again as a colony by Augustus,



Fig. 7. View of the Vivari Lake with the acropolis of Bouthrotum in the middle and the peninsula of Ksamilli and the Corfu Island in the background (Giorgi, Bogdani 2012. Courtesy of P. Giorgi).



Fig. 8. View of the archaeological excavation in the Vrinë Plain with the acropolis of Bouthrotum, the Ksamilli peninsula and the Corfu Island in the background (Greenslade 2013).

<sup>24</sup> The Italian Archaeological Mission of the University of Bologna at Butrint is now directed by Enrico Giorgi and by Albana Muka for the Institute of Archaeology of Tiran, within the agreement which also includes the *Phoinike* Project directed by Sandro De Maria and Shpresa Gjongecaj.

<sup>25</sup> Hansen 2011.

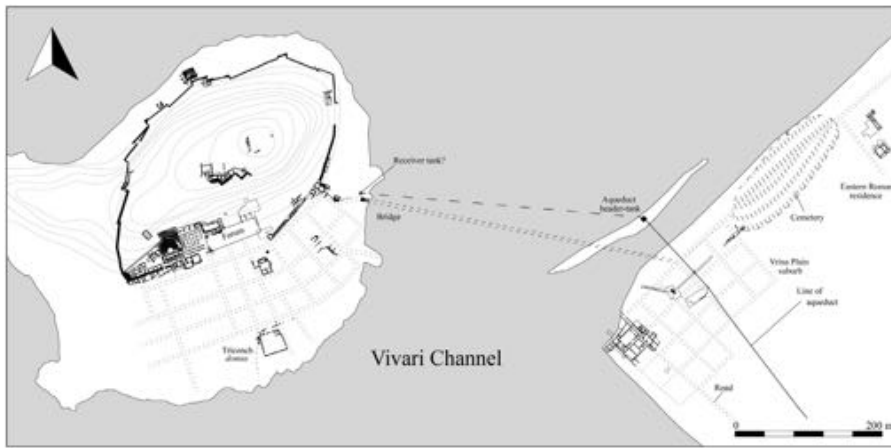


Fig. 9. Map of the acropolis of Bouthrotum and of the suburb of the Vrinë Plain during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (Greenslade 2013).

when Butrint changed its name from Colonia Julia to Colonia Augusta Bouthrotum (27 BC)<sup>26</sup>.

Political changes involved some consequent urban changes, especially in public buildings at the foot of the acropolis.

The civil heart of the new colony (the Forum) and the religious one (the area of the Sanctuary of Asclepius and the Theater) underwent interventions of monumentalisation which remodeled the urban shape without distorting it. For example, in the Augustan Age the Theater was enhanced with

a scene and with some statues of the imperial family, while the Agora was transformed into the Forum of the colony. Around the square, there were also places dedicated to the imperial cult and some other characteristic Roman buildings such as the Basilica. Also other new structures were constructed in the Roman era, such as the so-called Gymnasium, which could actually have been part of a big house. Smaller-scale works still testify to the vitality of citizenship even before the colony, as in the case of the so-called Well of Junia Rufina (2<sup>nd</sup> BC). At the same time, probably in the area of the Forum, there was a building phase even prior to the colonial grant. Part of the city walls were destroyed, between the Sanctuary of Asclepius and the so called Bridge Gate, and some buildings, like the Forum itself, developed beyond this ancient limit of the Hellenistic town. But the urban expansion went even farther than this, even along the plain

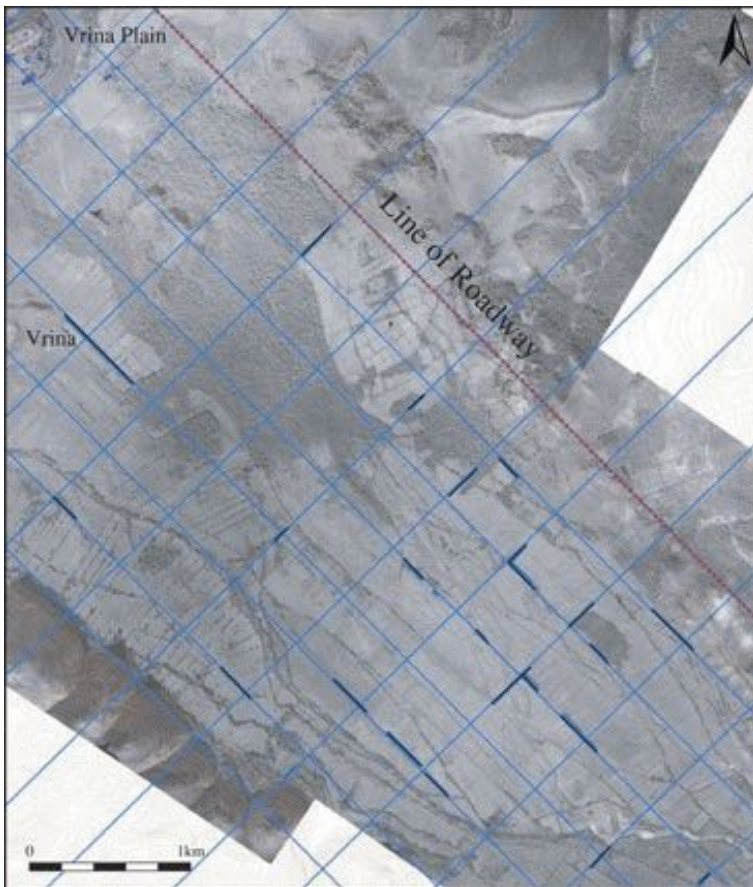


Fig. 10. Map with the remains and the reconstruction of the centuriation of Bouthrotum (blue lines) and with the line of the main road toward Nicopolis (Bescoby 2007)

<sup>26</sup> Deniaux 2005, 507-515; Hansen 2011, 90-92.

that was located on the other side of Vivari's Channel<sup>27</sup>.

In fact, between the early and mid-imperial age, there was an expansion in the Vrinë plain, on the other bank of the Channel, using the criteria of the Roman orthogonal urban planning. As part of this great urban addition, the Aqueduct and Bridge were built to allow the main road from Nicopolis to cross the canal connecting the growing Roman city in the plain with the Forum at the foot of the Acropolis. The growth of Roman settlement in the Vrinë plain took place at least from the Flavian period, with a series of houses located within a grid of at least four insulae separated by gravelled roads<sup>28</sup>.

This remarkable urban development did not remain isolated but was accompanied by a remodeling of the land, with the centuriation that expanded from Vrinë towards the south, draining large areas that before were dominated by wetlands. The urban planning and the centuriation had a similar orientation, with a difference of only 6 degrees. We can assume that the division of lands became necessary before the colony while the urban development on the Vrinë plain could have been expanded later. Even the road system that branched out into the surrounding region was part of this rational organization of urban space and the surrounding landscape. Probably the centuriation followed the main road that already crossed the plain from Bouthrotum towards Nicopolis, through Çuka Aitoit. This topographic organization of the Vrinë plain, with centuriation and the urban addition, was established in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and fixed in 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD<sup>29</sup>.

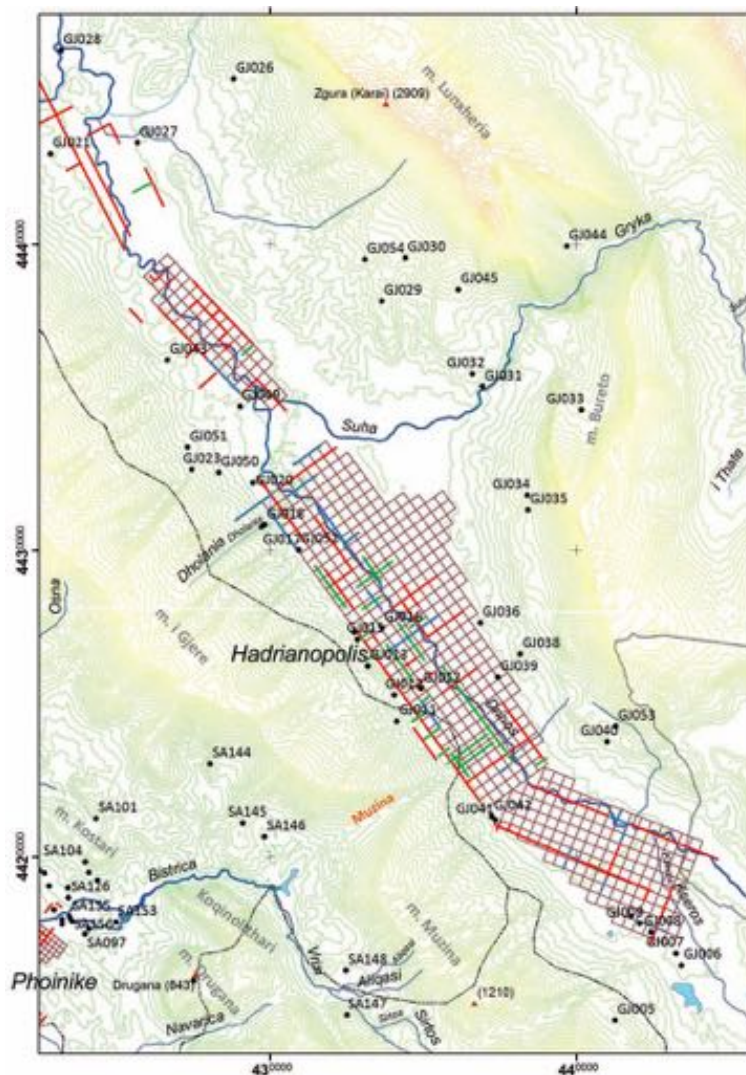


Fig. 11. Topographical Map with the centuriation of the Drinos Valley (red lines) and with the main rivers (Giorgi, Bogdani 2012)

<sup>27</sup> For a summary of the studies see: Bowden 2007, 189–209; Deniaux 2007; Hodges 2012, 53–78; Hansen, Hodges 2007; Melfi 2007; Hernandez, Çondi 2008, 275–292; Hansen 2009; Bowden 2011, 85–100; Hansen 2011, 85–100; Wilkes 2011, 93–97; Hernandez 2017a; Hernandez 2017b.

<sup>28</sup> Hodges 2013, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Traces of another set of land divisions following the same alignment, but conforming to units divisible by 12 and 16 actus also was detected in the same area. But we have to consider that the centuriation contemplate internal limits (*limites intercisivi*) even at smaller distances and it is very difficult to distinguish internal limits from others. See: Bescoby 2007, 113; Hodges 2013, 10–12. For the changes until the 13<sup>th</sup> century see: Greenslade 2013, 126.

## Hadrianopolis

The events that led to the destruction of Antigonea and to the genesis of a new urban center on the banks of the river Drinos in Hadrianopolis are well known and in part still under debate, as we have already said. Hadrianopolis and its territory is an object of a research project of the University of Macerata, directed by Roberto Perna in agreement with Dhimiter Çondi, for the Institute of Archaeology of Tirana. The important results obtained from this research team, always timely published, frees us from having to examine this city and thus allows us to concentrate briefly only on a few topics: the birth of the Roman city in the valley bottom and the Roman territorial infrastructures (viability and centuriation)<sup>30</sup>.

In the Roman era the main town of this territory, Hadrianopolis, developed to the left of the Drinos River, and it had solidly replaced the ancient Epirus center of Antigonea, which had previously dominated the valley from the plain on the opposite side. Based on the latest archaeological investigations, the first phases of occupation found in the area of Hadrianopolis seem to date back to at least the Hellenistic age, but for now this is represented only by relics found in the deepest stratigraphies and not in the form of stable structures. The first building phases, instead, date back to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, but the most consistent urban development dates to the mid-imperial age and in particular to the Age of Hadrian. For example, the construction of the theater and a nearby thermal baths complex can be placed in this timeframe.

The settlement in the surrounding territory does not show fractures in the transition to Roman rule: many farms and fortified villas continue to live from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> BC<sup>31</sup>. Also in the nearby valley of the Drinos, a centuriation system can be reconstructed; it was organized in blocks that continued with different orientations in order to accommodate the natural conformation of the valley. The centuriation develops along the detour of the via Egnatia going towards Nicopolis that runs along the right side of the valley bottom<sup>32</sup>.

### The comparison between *Phoinike*, *Hadrianopolis* and *Buthrotum*

At this point, we can highlight some important aspects by comparing the parabola of the three centers of Chaonia that we have examined thus far.

1. In Phoinike and in Buthrotum, the passage between the late Hellenistic age and the Roman era did not entail a cessation but rather a continuity in urban development. Over the course of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, interventions of urban rezoning in the main points of the city can be seen, such as the Agora and other buildings. In this period it seems as if the two towns conserved their administrative autonomy through the communities of the Chaonians in existence around Phoinike and of the Prasaiboi of Buthrotum<sup>33</sup>. Some scholars see this phenomenon as a shrinking of the territory of Chaonia linked to the Roman hegemony. Certainly this is true in terms of political autonomy but it does not mean that the new arrangement could not have produced a growth in the city and the

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<sup>30</sup> Perna 2012; Perna 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Perna 2012, 209–210.

<sup>32</sup> Giorgi 2004; Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, 405–407.

<sup>33</sup> It is not clear if these two communities were separate or if one incorporated the other as has been recently proposed: Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, 61; Melfi, Piccinini 2012, 44.

economy of its territories, connecting them with wider commercial circuits<sup>34</sup>.

2. In Buthrotum the granting of the Roman colonial status is very clearly a moment of revision of the citizenship and of the urban layout which adapts the most important building complexes to the new function.
3. In the case of Hadrianopolis, the genesis of the Roman center occurred later and in a completely different place with regards to the Hellenistic city.
4. Between the late Hellenistic and the early Roman era the defensive systems were lost. Many fortified sites were abandoned in the territory of Phoinike. In the fortified villas, like in Malathrea close to Butrint, we can see an expansion of the structures outside of the defensive walls. The walls of the city are not known in Hadrianopolis. In Phoinike and Buthrotum the urban space developed, going beyond the limit of the previous Hellenistic fortifications which then lost their function. This is why the issue is more about urban additions than suburbs.
5. The Roman urban development in Chaonia shows a significant expansion of the towns in the valley. In the cases of Phoinike and Buthrotum there are true urban additions in the plains next to Finiqi and Vrinë. In the case of Hadrianopolis, there is a new urban settlement in the Dropull plain. In any case, the urban areas are organized using the criteria of the Roman urban planning, with square blocks (*insulae*) and orthogonal streets (*viae*).
6. All three urban centers are part of a coherent design on a regional level that includes the reorganization of the surrounding territory using the centuriation system and the reorganization of the roads.
7. From a chronological point of view, in all three of the main urban centers of Chaonia, two important moments of urban development can be found and dated about to the early and middle imperial ages respectively.

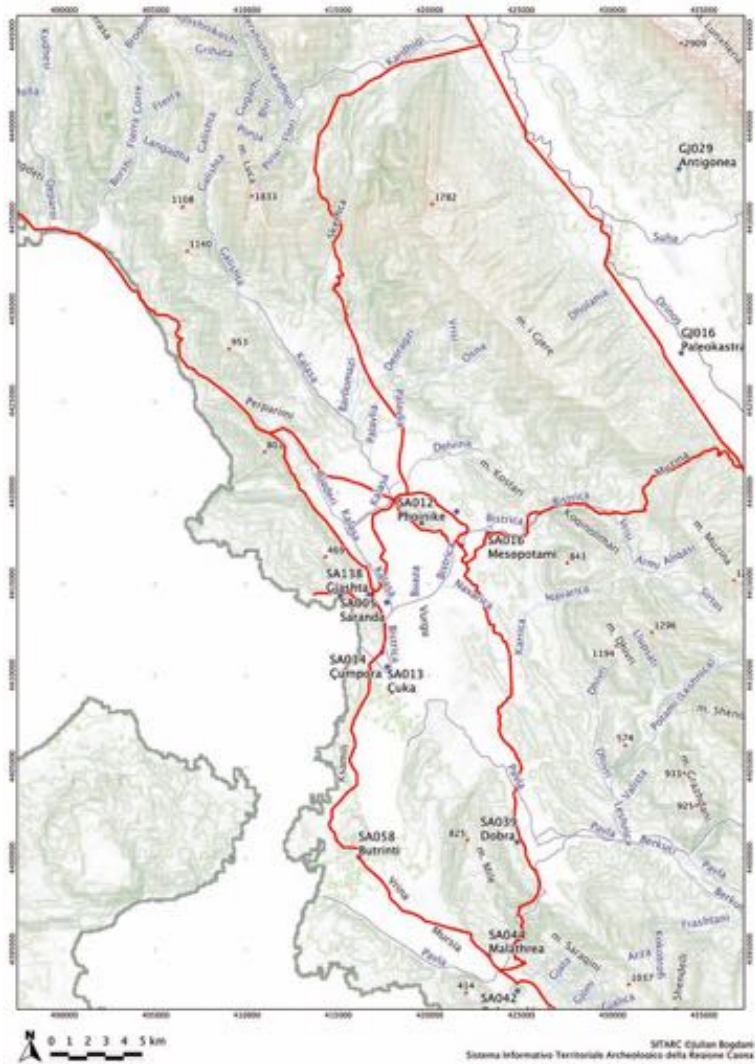


Fig. 12. Map with the reconstruction of the main Roman roads along the Drinos, Bistrica and Pavla Rivers coming from the Via Egnatia roads system(Giorgi, Bogdani 2012)

<sup>34</sup> Melfi, Piccinini 2012; Aleotti 2016; Gamberini 2016.

## Final conclusions

Up until now we have presented in particular a systemizing of data that are for the most part known, but which nevertheless allow us to shed some light on the uniform strategy that was at the basis of the reorganization of the Epirus territory under the Roman rule in the early and middle imperial age.

In conclusion it is useful to dedicate more attention to the initial structuring period during the Roman domination of Chaonia and to its main evolutive phases with a few hypotheses. These are not considerations based on irrefutable data but rather on many clues, that nonetheless deserve to be scrutinized for a more careful consideration.

To this end, we must take note of a difference between the cases of Phoinike and Buthrotum on one hand and that of Hadrianopolis on the other. The first two cities, in fact, pass from the Epirus koinon phase to Roman domination without any evident setbacks. For example with Phoinike we must remember, even if just from a purely statistical point of view, that the peak of numismatic findings can be dated to between the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC (Epirus koinon phase). At same time the peak of imported Attica can be dated to between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, while local productions continues until the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. During these two centuries we can find the beginning of the imported Italic wares. In conclusion the material culture in Phoinike shows changes but no fractures in this transitional phase<sup>35</sup>.

From a political point of view we do not know which exactly was the administrative order of these Epirus centers for most of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, but we can assume that they adapted the previous system to the new situation: after Pydna not only Epirus but also Chaonia was fractioned into at least two main communities around Phoinike and Buthrotum and presumably linked to Rome by an alliance (foedus)<sup>36</sup>. As far as we know, only in Buthrotum did this situation have an evolution with grants of the Triumviral and Augustan colony. More complex is the valley of the Drinos, for which we have been unable to locate an urban center until at least the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and we know that the city of Antigonea was destroyed at the end of the Third Macedonia War (168 BC) probably during the battles between various Epirus factions<sup>37</sup>.

Thus, Antigonea, even if with noticeable differences, is the only case in Chaonia that could be close to the destructions that occurred in the same period in some settlements of the Thesprotians and especially in Molossia. Probably the fate of Antigonea is linked to the interest that the Molossians always had in the Drinos valley as an access point towards the Adriatic<sup>38</sup>.

The case of Phoinike and Buthrotum is different in that at the end of the conflict they remained homogenous in terms of position with respect to the Roman expansionist politics and we have already seen the positive consequences in terms of archaeology. Nonetheless, the research conducted in the area of Phoinike must leave itself open to another possible consideration, that is to say the evolution of the city and the territory in the Roman era was founded on a situation that had previously been developed. In fact, the analysis of the settlement and in particular the distribution of the high ground defence system, combined with the stratigraphic data gathered on the hill of Phoinike, led us to reconstruct an organization that did not take the borders of Epirus into consideration but rather favoured those of just

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<sup>35</sup> Gjongecaj 2011; Gamberini 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, 61. For the different reconstructions of the *koinon* of the *Prasaiboi* see: Melfi, Piccinini 2012, 44.

<sup>37</sup> Cabanes 2007; Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, 116, 294, 413. For the remains of a Hellenistic settlement in the area of *Hadrianopolis* see: Perna 2014.

<sup>38</sup> Melfi, Piccinini 2012, 44; Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, 397–416.

the Phoinike territory in a period from the last decades of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and up to the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. These fortified centers seem to preserve the connections of the territory of Phoinike with Molossia (a region which was a faithful ally of the Macedonians), through the high valley of the Pavla river<sup>39</sup>. We could assume that already on the cusp of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC a precise Roman political strategy existed that could have conditioned and strongly influenced the development of the cities of Chaonia and in particular *Phoinike*.

At this time, probably Rome made alliances with several political communities, such as those of *Phoinike*. We can imagine that Rome applied the same scheme normally used in the relationship with its *clientes*: the opponents, like the Molossians, were punished hard and the collaborators, like the *Phoinike*, were backed up and rewarded. This would explain the different fate of the different regions of Northern Epirus. But this also explains the differences within each region because there could be different factions within the individual communities, favourable or unfavourable to the Romans. As we have seen, the destruction of *Antigonea* could be linked to this conflict between warring Epirotic factions. An epigraphic source of this period speaks of to a community of Epirotes gathering around *Phoinike* (*ton Epeiroton ton peri Phoiniken*) and we know there are coins attributed to the mint of this town in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. But we also know that *Phoinike* had parties against each other, who resorted to the arbitration of the Senate of Rome before the establishment of the Province<sup>40</sup>. Probably the creation of the *koinon* of the *Prasaiboi* (163 BC) was an acknowledgment of the important role played in favour of Rome and we do not know if the *koinon* of *Phoinike* was part of it or autonomous<sup>41</sup>.

Such a dynamic must be examined from a wider historic and geographic point of view that includes the wars of Rome against the Illyria and the Macedonians. A fundamental point of change can be found in the first crossing (*ten proten diabasin*) of the Roman legions on the eastern bank of the Adriatic-Ionian basin in 229 BC (*Polibius* II, 2, 4), while the endpoint can be placed in the reduction of Macedonia, Greece and Epirus into provinces of the Roman Empire in 146 BC. Over the course of this period, the erosion of the control system of the territory of the Epirus people can be seen and simultaneously the structuring of Roman domination can also be witnessed<sup>42</sup>.

We can assume there were three main phases during the period between the end of the Epirotic *koinon* (168 BC) and the birth of the Province of Epirus (108 AD). In the first phase, passing through the birth of the Province of Achaia and until the Roman Civil War and at least the battle of Actium (31 BC), the Chaonia region continued to prosper. In the second phase, corresponding to the Augustan age and the early imperial period, there was a growth, but only in Butrint linked to the grant of the colonial status. In the third phase, the middle imperial era from the Flavian age to the birth of the Province of Epirus under Trajan, we can recognize further developments.

In the first phase, the philo-Roman policy was promoted thanks to agreements with some minor communities, such as those of the *Phoinike* people and of the *Prasaiboi*, if not also some Epirus factions (in this sense, the episode of Charops the younger in *Phoinike* is paradigmatic)<sup>43</sup>. In the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, also the structuring of the road system of the *via Egnatia* offers proof of the Roman

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<sup>39</sup> Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, 91-93, 102-108, 407-411.

<sup>40</sup> Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, 61.

<sup>41</sup> According to a recent study the *koinon* of the *Prasaiboi* was wider and included several Epirotic regions (Chaonia, Kestrine in Tesprothia, Thyamis River in Molossia). For this and for the chronology of the birth of the *koinon* in 163 or 157 BC see: Melfi, Piccinini, 45.

<sup>42</sup> Thortnton 2014, 9-14.

<sup>43</sup> Cabanes 2012; Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, pp. 52-60; Melfi, Piccinini 2012, 45.



domination in these regions<sup>44</sup>. According to several survey projects in Greece, during the transition between the late Hellenistic and the early Roman era (3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC), there was a remarkable decline giving rise to the impression of a ‘desert empty landscape’<sup>45</sup>. This idea is confirmed by sources such as Caesar (*Bell. Civ.* III 12, 4) who tells about the difficulty of finding supplies for his army in Epirus and describes a desolate landscape. However the archaeology shows us a different situation, characterized by a substantial continuity of settlement in most of northern Epirus<sup>46</sup>.

During the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC some wealthy Roman citizens established their residences and their farms in Epirus, the so-called *synepeirotae* or *Epirotici homines* to whom the agricultural writing of Varro was directed (*De re rustica*, II 1, 1; II 2, 1). These people had to be true entrepreneurs, such as *Titus Pomponius Atticus* in *Buthrotum*, recipient of some well-known epistles of Cicero (*ad Att.* I 5; II 6), or *Lucius Cossinius* in Thesprotia<sup>47</sup>. With them they also established a way of life and a way of managing the resources of this area that could also have been attractive even to the Epirus people. The villa of Diaporit on the banks of Lake Vivari refers to this cultural climate and in this sense could explain the architectonic remodeling of some villas already built in the Hellenistic age, such as the Malathrea villa near *Buthrotum*. In part these are the well known Roman villa model with characteristics linked both to the *otium* and to economic production<sup>48</sup>. The manumissions written in stone and used in the theater of *Buthrotum* are proof of an increase in the number of slaves possessed by a single family in that same time period and could represent an indication of the estate tendencies that these rich land owners exercised on the territory, in line with their colleagues in Italy<sup>49</sup>.

During the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, there was a change of the urban landscape in Butrint. But epigraphic and literary sources offer proof a sweeping change also in the citizenship of Butrint. Two grants of colonial status were conferred between 44 and 27 BC and the new citizens were urban freedman and clients of powerful individuals in Rome, more than military veterans<sup>50</sup>. At the same time there was a detailed revision of the exploitation of all the surrounding territory. The reclamation of large areas of the valley allowed fundamental resources to be gained and in this sense and in this context we can place the centuriation of *Buthrotum* but also of *Phoinike* and of the Drinos Valley. But in the cases of the Bistrice and Drinos valleys, territories of *Phoinike* and *Hadrianopolis*, we have to ask who were the owners of these lands, because we do not have traces of a Roman colonization.

Centuriation is a systematic means of division of a specific area of land, but above all it has had an enormous influence on land reclamation. Putting the system into effect includes governance of the course of rivers and the drainage of surface water<sup>51</sup>. Can we assume that the citizens of *Phoinike* used this system without necessarily welcoming Roman settlers in their territory?

In this period, between the early and the middle imperial era, the town developed in the flatland of Finiqi using the criteria of Roman urban planning and using the centuriation system. But we do not know of colonial magistrates like in Butrint and we have not got any Latin inscriptions either. Epigraphic or literary sources, like Archaeology, do not show evidence of a change of the citizens in

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<sup>44</sup> Deniaux 2002, 65–80.

<sup>45</sup> Bowden 2003, 78–80. For an overview see: Alcock 1993.

<sup>46</sup> Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, 120–129.

<sup>47</sup> Bowden 2003, 73; Forsén, Tikka 2011, 18.

<sup>48</sup> Giorgi, Bogdani 2012, 120–124; 407–411.

<sup>49</sup> Cabanes 1997, 126.

<sup>50</sup> Hansen 2011, 89.

<sup>51</sup> About in these terms the definition in: Rosada, Dall’Aglia 2009, 16.

*Phoinike*. Can we speculate that the changes in the landscape of *Phoinike*, with a new urban planning and the centuriation system in the Finiqi plain, were put into effect even if there was not a Roma colonization, only because it was useful? In other words, can we speculate that even behind the way of organizing cities and their territories in this peripheral area of Greece, there could be a form of adaptation to the way of the victors specially after Actium?

Certainly this is easier to understand in later times. In fact, with the creation of the Province of Epirus, in 108 BC, it is possible that this dynamic found new ways of being applied, as it would seem based on the archaeological evidence in *Phoinike*. But we can assume that this is only the last part of a long term history which took place some centuries before in relation to the beginning of the Roman interest in this part of the Mediterranean area. It was no coincidence that Polibius started the unchallenged dominion of Rome (*aderitos exousia*) in the Mediterranean world with the end of the reign of Macedonia in 146 BC<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> Thortnton 2014, 10.

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