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Neolithic & Bronze Age Epirus revisited

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This paper presents a thorough review of new data and research on the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods in Epirus. It correlates new with old material in an attempt to outline the situation in Epirus and to highlight the region's peculiarities. These peculiarities make Epirus attractive for scholars and at the same time set it apart from the rest of Greece. The ultimate goal is to reconsider Epirus' position in the field of Greek and European prehistory more broadly.

In memory of my beloved father Dimitris

Introduction

Time and again, researchers across the world have repeated the cliché that the prehistory of Epirus is obscured by a thick fog. To what extent does this generalized statement correspond to reality? The purpose of this article is to outline the evidence for Neolithic and Bronze Age Epirus based on the data available from the publications and field surveys of the last 30 years with reference also to older discoveries.

Epirus lies in the northwestern part of the Greek peninsula. It is treated here as a geographical unit that includes four modern administrative districts: Ioannina, Arta, Preveza and Thesprotia (**Map 3**). For the chronological boundaries of the Neolithic and Bronze Age period in Epirus, the conventional tripartite scheme is used (Early, Middle and Late), as for the rest of Greece.

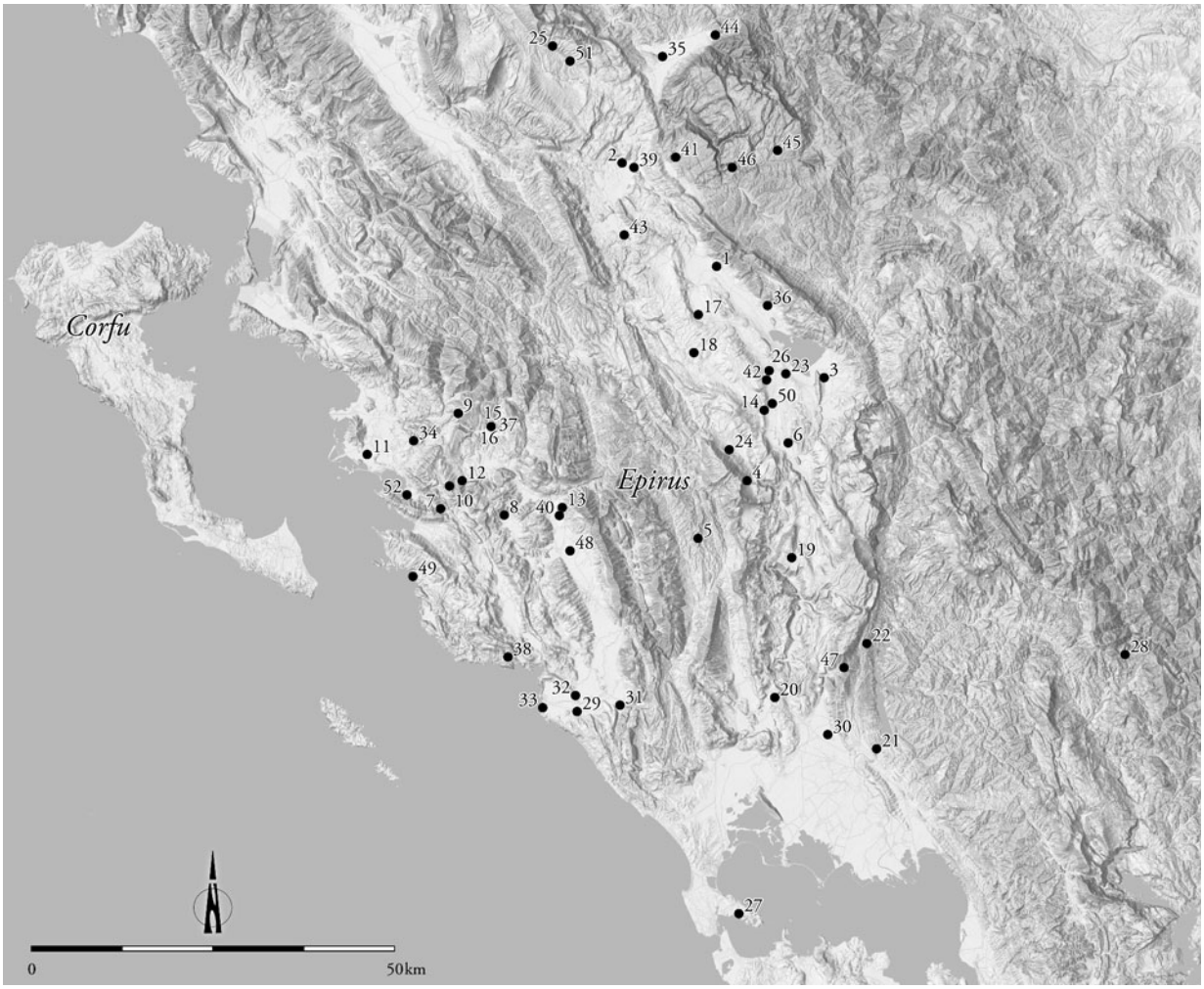
Recent work

The extent of new work in Epirus was made abundantly clear by the presentations delivered at two workshops entitled *Archaeological Work in Northwestern Greece and the Ionian Islands* that were held at the University of Ioannina (one of which has been published: Theophilopoulou 2018). Another regional meeting covered the prefecture of Thesprotia, from prehistory through to the Late Byzantine period (Chouliaras and Pliakou 2019). The reports of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, published in the *Archaiologikon Deltion*, provide further coverage of the region's recent archaeological activity. Of special interest, too, are the proceedings of a conference held in Ioannina in honour of Angelika Douzougli and Konstantinos Zachos, entitled *Speira* (Mermigka 2017). This volume contains a number of important recent studies on Epirus, some of which are mentioned below.

Fieldwork resulting from the expansion of the two major highways of the region (Egnatia and Ionia) has significantly increased the number of known sites. Moreover, in recent decades, four field surveys have been undertaken in Epirus. (1) The *Nikopolis Project* (Preveza) was carried out from 1991 to 1996 by the ASCSA in collaboration with the 12th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities and the 8th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities (Wiseman and Zachos 2003). (2) The project *Surveying the Changing Landscapes of Late-to-Post-Pleistocene Epirus (NW Greece)* (Ioannina) took place in 2008–2009 and was conducted by archaeologists of the 12th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, Eugenia Adam and Paraskevi Yiouni, along with external specialists Dimitris Kontogiorgos and Maria Ntinou (Adam *et al.* 2011; Ntinou *et al.* 2017). (3) The *Thesprotia Expedition* was conducted by the Finnish Institute at Athens from 2004 to 2010 in collaboration with the Ephorate of Antiquities of Thesprotia; a series of publications offers a synthesis of the project's results (Forsén 2009; 2019; Forsén and Tikalla 2011; Forsén *et al.* 2016). (4) *The Middle Kalamas Archaeology Project* (Thesprotia) was undertaken by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens in 2011–2015 in collaboration with the Ephorate of Antiquities of Thesprotia and in association with a number of other scientific institutions (EfA and the universities of Geneva and Tübingen) (Kourtessi-Philippaki *et al.* 2019).

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Map 3. Sites referred to in the text. 1. Asfaka; 2. Doliana; 3. Kastritsa; 4. Gouves; 5. Elaphos; 6. Episkopi; 7. Agia Marina (Thesprotia); 8. Psaka; 9. Sideri; 10. Goutsoura; 11. Pyrgos Ragiou; 12. Kanali (near Dramesi); 13. Finnish Institute at Athens Neolithic sites; 14. Agia Marina (Ioannina); 15. Skala; 16. Aetos; 17. Rodotopi; 18. Lofiskos; 19. Terovo; 20. Ziros Philippiada; 21. Vlacherna; 22. Pistiana; 23. Anatoli; 24. Dodona; 25. Anemomylos; 26. Palampouti; 27. Skaphidaki; 28. Agios Vasileios Piges (Arta); 29. Tsouknida; 30. Chanopoulo; 31. Kanalaki; 32. Ephyra; 33. Agia Eleni; 34. Kastriza; 35. Liatovouni; 36. Krya; 37. Skala (Middle Kalamas); 38. Kiperi; 39. Kalpaki; 40. Tsardakia Paramythia; 41. Elaphotopos; 42. Neochoropoulo; 43. Mazaraki; 44. Kato Konitsa; 45. Skamneli; 46. Kapesovo; 47. Ammotopos; 48. Xirolofos; 49. Agia Paraskevi; 50. Pedini; 51. Pogoni; 52. Ladhochori. © BSA.

Neolithic Epirus revisited

Very few Neolithic sites are known in Epirus (Papadopoulos 1974; Douzougli and Zachos 2002: 114–16; Yiouni 2008; Vasileiou 2018a). Until recently, only the following sites had yielded any Neolithic pottery: **Asfaka** on the edge of the drained Lake Lapsista (calibrated date 7380±240 BP: Higgs and Vita Finzi 1966: 8, 22; Douzougli and Zachos 2002: 116); **Doliana** close to the Greek-Albanian border, where two successive phases of use with hearths and a significant amount of pottery have been unearthed (calibrated dates 3770–3370 BC, 3495–2925 BC, 3505–3035 BC and 3690–3365 BC: Douzougli 1996: 117–19; Douzougli and Zachos 2002: 124–43); **Kastritsa** on the edge of Lake Pamvotis (Dakaris 1951: 177–78; 1952: 362; Vokotopoulou 1968: 291–92; Douzougli and Zachos 2002: 117–21); the rockshelter at **Gouves** on Mount Tomaros (Zachos 1992: 242–43; Douzougli and Zachos 2002: 121–24); **Elaphos** at Lakka Souli (Dakaris 1969: 253); and the caves of **Agia Marina**, **Psaka** and **Sideri** in Thesprotia (Dakaris 1961–1962: 195–96; 1972: 46–49). A number of unstratified lithic tools have been collected from different sub-regions of Epirus (Papadopoulos 1974: 128–31; Yiouni 2008: 35).

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A Neolithic extended site (calibrated dates 5619–5494 BC and 5563–5466 BC) – the first of this type in Epirus – was discovered during salvage excavations in 2007–2010 related to the construction of a large shopping centre at **Episkopi** (**ID2518**) in the southern part of the Ioannina basin (Pliakou 2007a: 194–95; 2007b: 777–79; Zachos and Vasileiou 2010; 2012; Vasileiou 2016a) (**Fig. 102**). Episkopi extends along the slopes of a low hill surrounded by small seasonal lakes. On the plateau of the hill, partially under a Roman cemetery, the excavations revealed eight pits containing a large number of stone tools and pottery sherds (Pliakou and Vasileiou 2008: 765; Zachos and Vasileiou 2012: 346). In total, 24 pits have been uncovered across an area of around 1,100m². They range in size from 0.7m to 5.3m in diameter, and are circular and ellipsoidal in shape. These various shapes and sizes could be a result of different uses. The use of the largest for storage or refuse cannot be excluded *a priori*, but the occurrence of postholes inside some pits suggests the existence of semi-subterranean dwellings.



102. Episkopi: Neolithic pit with postholes. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports: Ephorate of Antiquities of Ioannina.

The lithic assemblage from Episkopi is characterized overwhelmingly by blades and bladelets produced almost exclusively from local chert (Pliakou and Vasileiou 2008: 765; Adam 2016; 2018: 68–69), with the exception of 11 tools made from obsidian (Vasileiou *et al.* forthcoming). Preliminary study of the ceramic assemblage suggests that the vessels were crudely made and poorly fired. They can be divided into three categories: monochrome, black burnished and impressed (**Fig. 103**). The shapes are simple, with open forms dominating (mainly bowls and jars, when the shape can be identified). The impressed pottery connects Episkopi with the much wider area of the Early Neolithic Adriatic complex (Spataro 2002: 24–28; Vasileiou 2016b). In addition, a distinct ware has been identified. This is characterized by very lightweight sherds with many surface holes, due, probably, to the mixing of plant fibres with the clay paste during production (Vasileiou *et al.* forthcoming).

At present, no Neolithic sites are known in the region of Arta, and only one such site has been recorded in Preveza by the *Nikopolis Project* (Tartaron 2004: 189–97). The *Thesprotia Expedition* has now identified several sites that can be dated to the Neolithic. More specifically, human occupation from the Early to Middle Neolithic can be detected at sites **PS43**, **PS20**, **PS18** and possibly also **PS28** (**ID153**, **ID460**;



103. Episkopi: sherds with impressed decoration. © P. Tsigoulis.

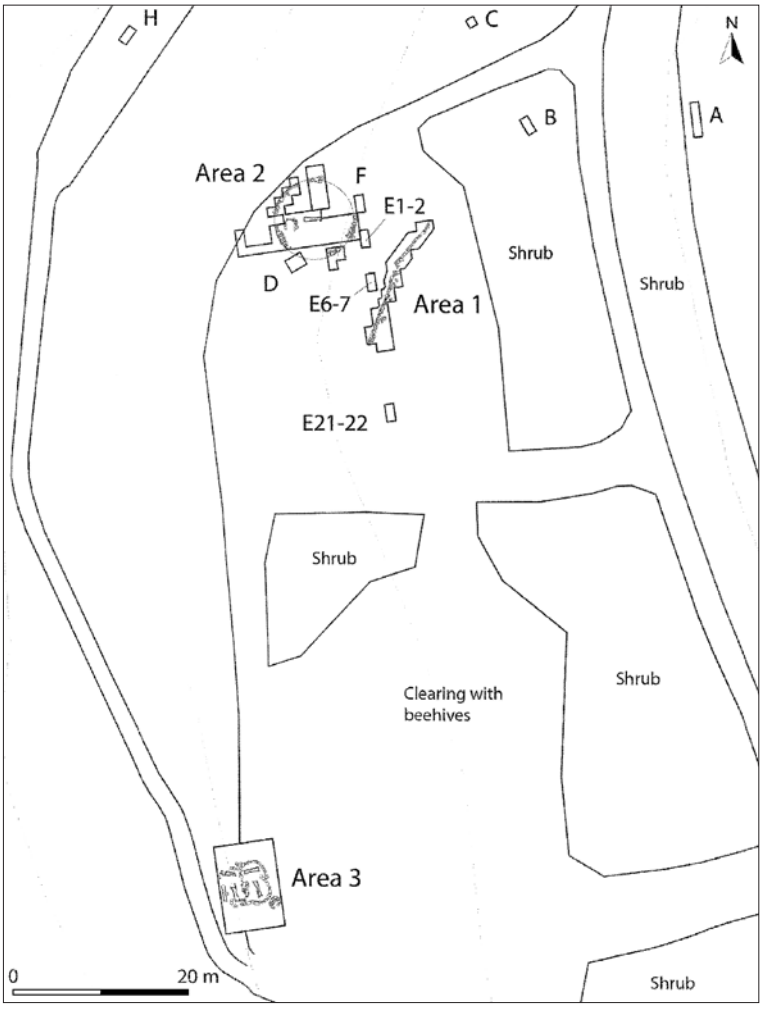
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Forsén *et al.* 2011: 73–122; Forsén and Galanidou 2016: 10–16). In addition, according to the excavators, 'impresso' sherds of Early Neolithic date, mixed with sherds of the Final Neolithic to Early Bronze Age, have been identified at the site of **Goutsoura** (**PS12**; **ID815**, **ID1685**, **ID1929**; Forsén *et al.* 2011: 82). Also, the toolkit from the site of **Pyrgos Ragiou** (end scrapers, limaces and leaf-shaped points) can be dated from the Final Neolithic to the Late Bronze Age (Palli 2019: 66). Furthermore, the lithic and ceramic assemblages from **Kanali** (near Dramesi), collected during surveys conducted by the University of Athens, can be attributed to the same period (Chelioti 2018; Kourtessi-Philippaki *et al.* 2019: 13).

Bronze Age Epirus revisited

The Early Bronze Age

The transition from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age in Epirus is not characterized by any obvious changes in material culture. The Neolithic way of life continued here throughout the Bronze Age. The number of sites that can be dated to the Early Bronze Age remains meagre. Two that can be assigned securely are **Agia Marina** in Ioannina (**ID3411**; Adam 1998: 485–86; Siozou 2019) and **Goutsoura** in Thesprotia (**ID815**; B. Forsén 2016) (**Fig. 104** Area 1), and two further sites (**Skala** and **Aetos**) have been reported on the basis of Early Bronze Age sherd scatters (Dakaris 1972: 66, 153). The period is also represented by 11 bronze single-edged axes (Veselinovo type) from **Rodotopi** (four in one hoard) and **Lofiskos, Terovo** (two examples, one now missing) in the area of Ioannina, **Ziros Philippiada** in Preveza and **Vlacherna** and **Pistiana** in the area of Arta (a further example from this area is of unknown provenance). Two flat chisels, which can be assigned to the end of this period based on parallels from Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and Macedonia, come from **Anatoli** and **Rodotopi** (Kleitsas 2019).



104. Goutsoura: Early Bronze Age settlement.© Finnish Institute at Athens.

Agia Marina (calibrated date 3330–3030 BC), near the village of Pedini, is a seasonal settlement where piles of stones, mudbricks and handmade pottery (with plastic and incised decoration, a few black burnished and some sherds with red slip) together with a few spindle-whorls have been revealed during works associated with the construction of the Via Egnatia. From under the pile of stones, in trench B of the excavation, a burial, possibly of a woman aged 20–35 years old, came to light (Siozou 2019: 41–2).

Goutsoura in Thesprotia is located on the lowermost slope of the Liminari hill. It is an open-air site consisting of huts made of wattle and daub. The settlement was first inhabited between 2925 and 2400 BC. It was then abandoned for some four centuries and used as a cemetery from the late Middle Bronze or early Late Bronze Age. It continued to be inhabited until the

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end of the Bronze Age (*ca.* 1300–1100 BC). The cultural layer of the Early Bronze Age is characterized by brown, sticky, clay soil containing pottery, animal bones, lithic material and metal objects. The ceramic assemblage consists of low-fired monochrome (black and brown) rough or polished pottery and sherds with plastic decoration (J. Forsén 2016). Of special interest is a group of 11 spoons and some sherds with impressed decoration which have parallels from Bosnia, Romania and Bulgaria. The chipped-stone assemblage is made from local materials, and the tools were probably used for a range of tasks (Doulkeridou 2016: 211–26). A number of small finds made of bone, metal (a punch) and clay (nine spindle-whorls and a spool) have also been collected from Goutsoura, indicative of the domestic character of the site (Papayiannis 2016: 227–43).

The Middle Bronze Age

The archaeological record documenting the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age in the area is limited to the following: a group of bronze knives from **Dodona** (Soueref 2001: 93–94); the remains of an apsidal building at **Anemomylos** in the region of Pogoni, near the Greek-Albanian border (Andreou 2003: 117–33); a seasonal settlement at **Palampouti** (Katsadima 2012: 347; Katsadima and Vasileiou 2014; 2018; Vasileiou 2015: 61–63; 2018b: 148); the foundations of apsidal buildings at **Piges** (Arta) (https://youtu.be/IBNa-JQcimc); a site consisting of two stratified road cuttings at **Skaphidaki** (Preveza) (Tartaron 2004: 59–61) and a cemetery at **Goutsoura** (Thesprotia) (Lima 2016).

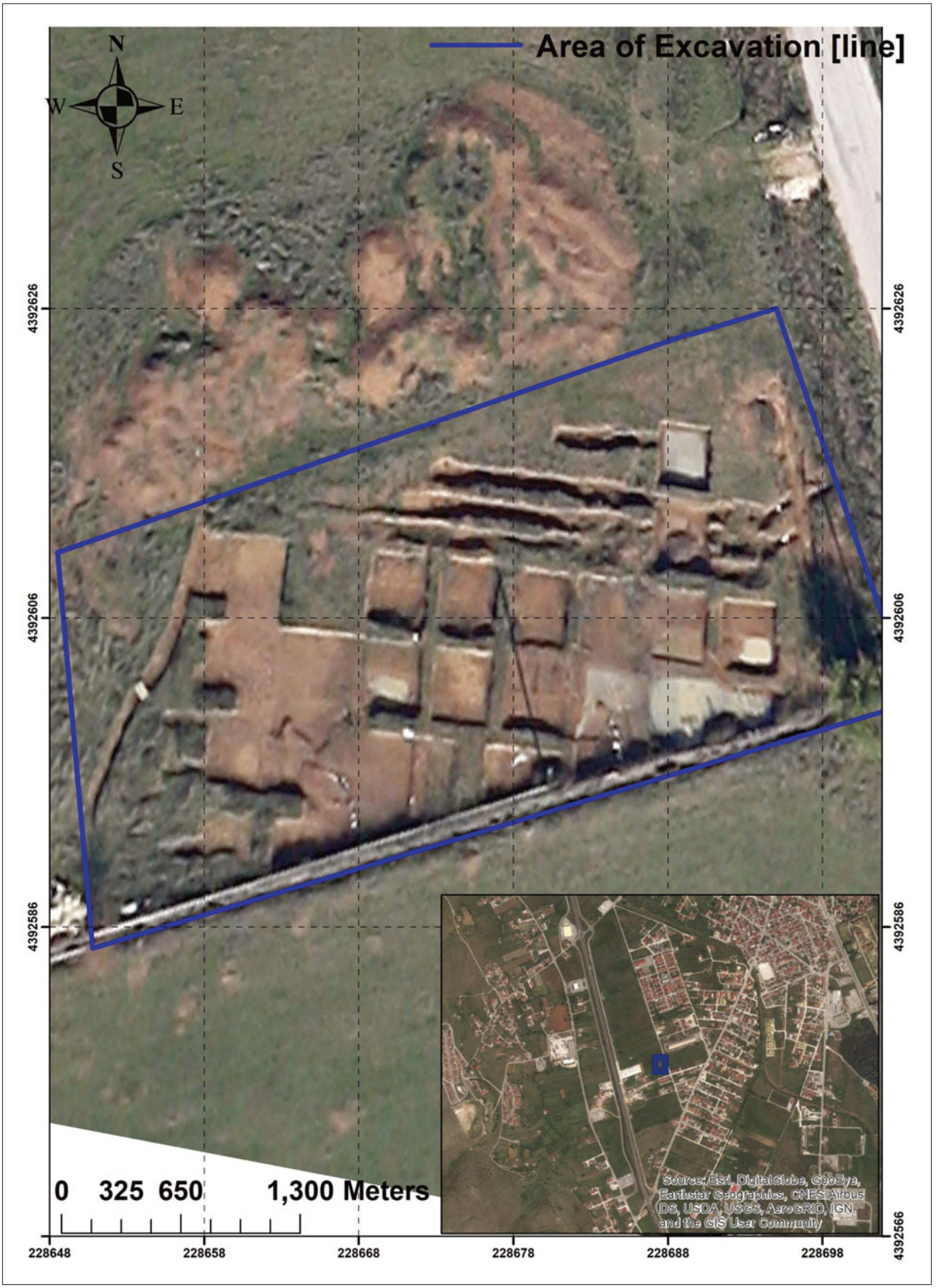
A prehistoric settlement of the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age came to light during excavations conducted between 2010 and 2011 at **Palampouti** (**ID2521**) (**Figs 105**, **106**) in the area of Ioannina (calibrated dates 1730/1686–1529/1541 BC: Vasileiou 2018b: 147). Although its full extent still remains to be defined, it is reasonable to suggest that it was a rural habitation site of seasonal use. The excavation revealed a clear cultural layer with grey-brown soil, burnt mudbricks, pottery, clay spindle-whorls and stone artefacts. In the southwestern part of the excavation area, a course of stones forming a semicircle was uncovered. This probably formed part of a hut that was made largely of perishable materials. A clay hearth filled with ashes was also discovered.

A preliminary study of the Palampouti pottery has revealed that the ceramic assemblage consists of two main categories: monochrome (thin and thick walled) and plastic decoration (Vasileiou 2016b). Both are represented by open and closed forms of brown, grey and orange-red colour. The fabric is usually grey and rich in inclusions. There are also two clay spoons in the ceramic assemblge, with parallels from Goutsoura (Vasileiou and Tzovaras forthcoming). A short cylindrical blue-glass bead with an incised net pattern seems to be of particular importance; it has close parallels at Elateia-Alonaki in central Greece and in Italy (Nightingale 2003, fig.1:7).



105. Palampouti: selection of pottery fragments. © P. Tsigoulis.

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106. Palampouti: aerial view. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports: Ephorate of Antiquities of Ioannina (photo by P. Tzovaras).

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At **Agios Vasileios Piges** (Arta), the remains of apsidal buildings, probably belonging to the Middle Bronze Age (1700–1550 BC), at least two burials, a significant amount of pottery and some flint tools have been revealed (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBNa-JQcimc&t=47s). A cist tomb discovered at **Gianniotio** (Arta) containing a bronze knife and two handmade clay vases (a kantharos and cup) has also been assigned to the Middle Bronze Age (Vokotopoulou 1968: 286). Recently, a Middle to Late Bronze Age settlement at Kokkino Lithari near the village of **Ammotopos** was uncovered during construction work for the Ionian highway connecting western Greece to Athens (www.archaiologia.gr/blog/2015/09/30/αμμότοπος-άρτας-το-μυστικό-ενός-λόφου). Unstratified pottery and lithics dated to the Middle Bronze Age have been identified at **Tsouknida** in the Preveza area (Siska 2014) during salvage excavations on the route connecting Kanalaki to the national road (Preveza to Igoumenitsa).

At **Goutsoura**, remains of a funerary tumulus (diameter 9–10m), with a wall encircling the perimeter, have been revealed (Lima 2016: 157–89) (**Fig. 104** Area 2). The inner part was filled with stones mixed with soil. Two badly preserved child burials were uncovered, and in the centre of the tumulus a cist grave was found. The cist contained the remains of two adults but no offerings. The tumulus seems to date to the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age (calibrated date 1780–1610 BC).

Finally, a small quantity of Middle Bronze Age handmade pottery has been collected from the north-western slopes of **Ntoulka** in Thesprotia, along with a few stone tools (Kourtessi-Philippaki *et al.* 2019: 14).

The Late Bronze Age

The quantity of archaeological data increases towards the end of the Bronze Age. Chance findings, handmade pottery and metal objects have been recorded (Vasileiou 2015; 2018a; 2018b). At **Asfaka**, during fieldwork for the *Surveying the Changing Landscapes of Late-to-Post Pleistocene Epirus (NW Greece)* project, a number of handmade sherds were collected from three different locations (Anavra 1, 2 and 3), which, based on their morphology, are taken to belong to the Bronze Age. The analysis of two charcoal samples from the same area confirmed that they can be assigned to the Late Bronze Age (calibrated dates 1390–1120, 1270–1010 BC) (Adam *et al.* 2011: 5–6; Ntinou *et al.* 2017). Handmade pottery possibly dating to the Late Bronze Age has been collected at **Chanopoulo** in the area of Arta (**ID2538**; Riginos 2012: 357) and at an apsidal building in the area of **Kampi** (Merkouri 2014: 1703). At the site of **Kanalaki**, during the construction of the road connecting Kanalaki with the national route from Preveza to Igoumenitsa, a collection of Bronze Age pottery with plastic decoration was found (**ID2534**; Drossou 2011: 659; Riginos 2012: 356).

Settlements. The number of known Late Bronze Age settlements is quite small, and architectural remains, usually in the form of stone piles, remain scarce (Vasileiou 2008; 2017). The absence of substantial structures and deep deposits has been seen by some scholars as evidence for the existence in the area of casual, temporary habitation used by transhumant or nomadic populations (Pliakou 2018: 136). However, this traditional view, that a long-term tradition of nomadic or transhumant pastoralism was practised by the Epirotes of the Bronze Age, does not fit with the observed settlement pattern (Halstead 1996). Lowland and coastal sites, on the slopes of low hills and beside lakes, would have been suitable for developing year-round crop production and animal husbandry. The locations of the settlements were apparently dictated by economic factors relating to the exploitation of all potential local resources. A mixed economy based on small-scale farming and herding along with the exploitation of marine, lacustrine and riverine resources seems, therefore, to have been the norm during the Late Bronze Age (Douzougli and Zachos 1994: 12–14).

The settlements that have been identified are distinguished as either open or closed (walled or naturally fortified). Fortified settlements have been confirmed in Thesprotia only, for example at **Ephyra** (Papadopoulos and Papadopoulou 2020), **Agia Eleni** and **Kastriza** (Tartaron 2004: 37–38, 44–48). However, traces of retaining or fortification walls have been also identified in the Ioannina district at the sites of **Liatovouni** (Douzougli 1994: 367–70; 1996; 1997; Douzougli and Papadopoulos 2011; Vasileiou

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2015: 65–72; 2017: 224–26; 2018b: 149–50) and **Pogoni** (Kleitsas and Andreou 2018: 88–91). Stratified deposits come from just two settlements: **Krya** (Andreou 1988: 604; 1994: 239–40; Douzougli and Zachos 1994: 12–14; Zachos 1995: 252–53; 1997: 153–66; Vasileiou 2011: 267–77; 2015: 55–61; 2017: 222–24; 2018b: 149) and **Liatovouni**.



107. Skala: apsidal building. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports: Ephorate of Antiquities of Thesprotia.

A settlement and a few funerary remains came to light during salvage excavations at the site of **Stenes**, situated between Makrychora and Krystallopege in Thesprotia (Preka-Alexandri 1995; Preka-Alexandri and Sakkas 2019). The ceramic finds comprise the usual categories attested in Epirus (Vasileiou 2015: 94–102) along with a few wheelmade Mycenaean sherds. Moreover, finds of spinning and weaving equipment (spools and spindle-whorls) point to the domestic character of the settlement at Stenes. At **Skala** (**ID4075**), facing the valley of the Middle Kalamas river, the remains of two apsidal buildings with handmade pottery of the end of the Bronze Age have been discovered (Riginos 2005: 574) (**Fig. 107**).

Burials. Information concerning social organization remains sporadic and mainly derives from the study of burial practices. A number of tombs belonging to the Bronze Age period have been found scattered across the region.



108. Skamneli: Late Helladic cist tomb. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports: Ephorate of Antiquities of Ioannina.

Only one Mycenaean-type tholos tomb is known from Epirus. This was found in a looted state at **Kiperi** near Parga (Papadopoulos 1981). The absence of rock-cut chamber tombs is noteworthy. The predominant grave type across Bronze Age Epirus was the cist tomb. Previously known examples have been identified at **Kalpaki** (Dakaris 1956), **Kastritsa** (Dakaris 1964: 312–13), **Tsardakia Paramythia** (Dakaris 1965), **Elaphotopos** (Vokotopoulou 1967: 344–45; 1969: 179–91), **Neochoropoulo** (Dakaris 1967–1968), **Mazaraki** (Vokotopoulou 1969: 191–203), **Skaphidaki** Andreou 1994: 243), **Kato Konitsa** (**ID1694**; Faklari 2000: 589). To these, we can now add a few more examples: the tombs at **Skamneli** (Vasileiou *et al.* 2018; forthcoming), a looted tomb at **Kapesovo** (Nikos Choinas, personal communication June 2017), a tomb at Kokkino Lithari near **Ammotopos** (www.archaiologia.gr/blog/2015/09/30/αμμότοπος-άρτας-το-μυστικό-ενός-λόφου), another at **Xirolofos** (prefecture of Souli) (Forsén *et al.* 2011: 84; Lazari forthcoming) and two more cist tombs on the beach of **Agia Paraskevi** (Tzortzatou 2009: 642).

Of these, it is worth mentioning that Grave 1 at Skamneli (**Fig. 108**), which contained two skeletons (a male and a female), was richly furnished with a bronze spiral bracelet, a bronze anklet with a central rib ending in spirals, several bronze rings, a bronze

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wheel-headed pin (length 17.5cm), two bronze elongated horseshoes, a significant number of beads made of various materials (crystal, chalcedony, faience, amber), and fragments of small bone pipes (*syringes*). The fill of the tomb contained fragments of a matt-painted jug, a wide-mouth jar with plastic decoration, a cup and an unpainted cantharus, together with a few handmade sherds.

The tombs across Epirus generally contained one to three skeletons, of men, women and children, and were furnished with bronze and clay pots, bronze jewellery (bracelets, rings, earrings), beads of various materials (faience, crystal, amber, etc.) and bronze weapons. The deposition of weapons, both in cist and shaft graves, may be related to the display of power and wealth by local elite groups and, through it, the establishment and consolidation of their positions as leaders. Moreover, the appearance of valuable objects among grave offerings (bronze weapons, jewellery of northern and southern origins and 'Mycenaean' ceramics) at the end of the Bronze Age indicates the existence of an elementary social stratification.

Five shaft graves are known from the region: at **Liatovouni** (Douzougli and Papadopoulos 2011: 23–35), at **Pedini** (**ID3413**; Adam 2001–2004: 2; Vasileiou 2018a: 76), at **Ephyra** (Drossou 2014: 1689–90; Merkouri 2018: 378) and at **Stenes** (two tombs: Preka-Alexandri 1995: 446–47; Preka-Alexandri and Sakkas 2019: 74). The Liatovouni tomb (T59) is dated to the Late Helladic IIIC. It belonged to a man who was buried with a well-preserved bronze sword, a bronze spearhead, a bronze knife and a LHIIIC skyphos with traces of painted decoration. At Ephyra, the human remains are very damaged, but it seems that the deceased was placed in a south–north orientation. The furnishings (clay vases, bronze weapons, bone artefacts, a small gold bead and an iron nail) date the tomb to the LHIIIB period (**Fig. 109**). At Stenes, tomb 4 yielded two beads (one gold and the other clay) and a handmade vase (**Fig. 110**). This tomb also revealed traces of fire burning, a stone pile and some horse bones, indicating the existence of social stratification in the settlement (Forsén and Galanidou 2016: 15). Stenes tomb 11 was largely damaged, and the only surviving find is a bronze spearhead.



109. Ephyra: shaft grave furnished with weapons. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports: Ephorate of Antiquities of Preveza.



110. Stenes: handmade black burnished bowl. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports: Ephorate of Antiquities of Thesprotia.

Across Epirus we are still lacking evidence for large organized cemeteries of the Bronze Age period, with the possible exception of tumuli. Clusters of tumuli have been found at **Ephyra** (Papadopoulos 1987: 139–42; Papadopoulos and Papadopoulou 2020), at **Pogoni** (Andreou 1988; Andreou and Andreou 1999) and **Ladhochori** (Lazari 2014; 2019: 407; forthcoming) (**Fig. 111**). At Ladhochori, a tumulus covered with stones and pebbles has been unearthed. It contained four cist tombs furnished with handmade pottery. Three of the tombs were made of thin limestone slabs and belonged to children. One of the tombs was delimited by a stone circle.

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111. Ladhochori: Late Helladic tumulus. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports: Ephorate of Antiquities of Thesprotia.

Discussion

The material culture assemblages from all the sites referred to above demonstrate sufficient similarities to give the impression of an unbroken cultural continuity from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age. The paucity of the Neolithic data does not, however, permit us to draw any clear conclusions about this period in Epirus. Generally speaking, it is not possible to conclude that the Neolithic population tended to select settlements near wetland settings (rivers or lakes). Moreover, the discovery of the extended site of Episkopi in the region of Ioannina supports the idea that the Neolithic inhabitants of Epirus did not move from one place to another. Based on the ceramic and lithic assemblages, it can be assumed that a network of contact and exchange was developed between the herders and farmers of Epirus and those of adjacent regions. The presence of impressed pottery indicates cultural affinities between Epirus, the Ionian islands (for example, Sidari on Corfu), Albania (for example, Konispol cave) and southern Italy, while the occurrence at Episkopi of tools made of obsidian points to contacts with the Aegean.

For the Bronze Age, settlement patterns and burial forms show ostensible continuity. The fragmentary picture we currently have of the architectural remains, however, does not at present allow us to develop a firm impression of settlement hierarchy and organization in Bronze Age Epirus. Yet the appearance of valuable objects among burial offerings (for example, bronze weapons, jewellery of northern origin and 'Mycenaean' ceramics) at the end of the Bronze Age is indicative of an elementary social stratification. The only safe assumption is that there was continuity of settlement. No palatial centre has been found in Epirus. The development of centralized settlements with a proto-urban character, a feature of the Early Bronze Age in southern Greece, is not observed there. People living in central Epirus took advantage of the river routes and mountain paths to establish and sustain contacts with areas to the south and north during the second millennium BC. The appearance of elaborate graves at strategic inland points is possibly linked to the emergence of a group of powerful individuals ('warriors'?), who gained strength from their ability to control the transport and circulation of precious goods.

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To conclude, over the course of the last 30 years much progress has been made in the study of Neolithic and Bronze Age Epirus, partly due to multidisciplinary collaboration between a range of specialists (in archaeology, physics, chemistry, geology). Lately, significant progress has been made, with thin-section and pXRF analyses of the handmade pottery of Epirus (Yiouni 2017; Yiouni and Vasileiou 2017; 2018). Skeletal analysis of remains from some Late Bronze Age tombs and a palaeo-diet survey employing stable isotope analysis are also in progress.

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