

Introduction

Jacob Isager

In 1984 the first international congress was held on the theme, Nikopolis, the city founded by Caesar Augustus after his victory in the naval battle of nearby Actium in 31 BC. A large group of scholars met in the city of Preveza close to the site of Nikopolis to present their papers on this important theme, so evidently neglected until then. The proceedings of the congress, edited by E. Chrysos, were published in 1987 and, as the first, major publication which treated in monograph form a wide range of historical, archaeological, art historical, religious, and other aspects, it certainly awakened the interest of the international scholarly world to this city, which came to play such an importing role in the development of Northwestern Greece in the Roman Imperial and early Byzantine periods. The much sought after monograph marked the start of a new era for the investigation of Nikopolis and the impact of the synoecism. Many further topics were taken up later by other scholars. A very fruitful discussion, for example, of the status of the city now seems to have ended with an almost universal agreement upon the fact that Nikopolis was not a Roman *colonia* and did not receive colonists. It had the status of a *civitas foederata*.

Other problems which had already been considered include the following: The foundation of Nikopolis was a result of a synoecism of numerous Greek cities in Epirus, Acharnania and Aetolia, whose inhabitants were forced to leave their former dwellings and establish themselves in the newly built city. An important question raised was to what extent the former cities were left deserted as a result of the synoecism.

Another problem was the inhabitants' relation to their former rural properties and the possible redistribution of this land. Many of these Greek cities still awaited archaeological research, which could give us indications of their possible destruction or reduction.

For Nikopolis itself still remained, as it does today, the huge tasks of making systematic investigations in the city area and locating the administrative and religious centre or centres of the city. The unique rostral monument erected on a hill just north of the city by Augustus to celebrate his victory at Actium for all eternity was at the time of this first Nikopolis conference almost unexcavated. Systematic, archaeological surveys in the vast hinterland of the newly established city were then only in preparation.

In his contribution to the proceedings of 1987, James Wiseman proposed a plan for an investigation of the city and its region, which focused on registration, conservation and restoration of the existing monuments inside and outside the city and a regional survey which included geophysical prospecting and other types of remote sensing. This project, eventually, became reality as a joint venture between the 12 Ephoria of Classical and Prehistoric Antiquities in Ioannina, represented by Konstantinos Zachos, and Boston University, represented by James Wiseman.

When the Danish Institute in Athens in 1997 took the initiative to arrange a new symposium on the foundation of Nikopolis and its effects upon the surrounding region, the picture had completely changed. The Archaeological Service of Ioannina had begun a systematic excavation of the

Rostral monument of the Actian victory, and through a series of investigations and excavations inside and outside Nikopolis it had also thrown new light on the relationship between the city and the surrounding region. It also contributed to more precise dating of the material from the Roman period in Northwestern Greece.

The Greek-American survey campaigns had, as well, covered a large area of the region west, north and east of the city of Nikopolis and this together with the geographical soundings on the northern coast of the Ambracian Gulf had established much new and more precise knowledge of the landscape and its changes.

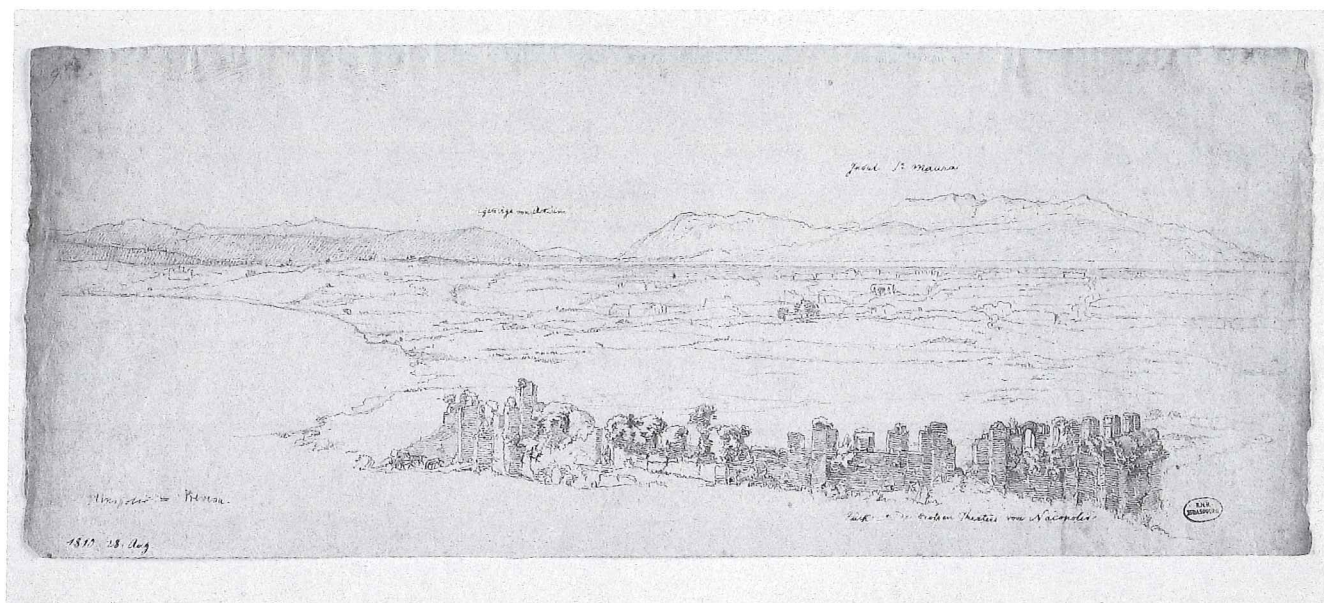
Finally, as far as the regions south of Nikopolis across the Strait of Actium, that is Akarnania and Aetolia, are concerned, in collaboration with the Archaeological Service of the Ephoria of Patras, the German, Danish, and Dutch survey campaigns, investigations and excavations had contributed to unveil the history of Greek sites, which were affected by the Roman invasion of Greece and the foundation of the new, central city.

Thus, the common interest in bringing together for the first time the Greek and foreign scholars working in the area affected by this change of the urbanistic pattern, was evident. Konstantinos Zachos, Head of the Ephoria of Ioannina, Professor James R. Wiseman, Boston University, and Professor Peter Funke, University of Münster supported the idea of the Symposium from the start and have given advice and help during the preparations. So has the director of the Danish Institute at Athens, Signe Isager, who gave shelter to the Symposium at the Institute and made arrangements with the Italian School for a larger auditorium for three public lectures. Acting as host, she introduced the Symposium and the public sessions and together with her staff she took care in the best possible manner of all the different arrangements and administrative matters. I am most grateful to them all.

The theme for the Symposium, held at the Danish Institute at Athens in March 1999, was "Northwestern Greece before and after the foundation of Nikopolis". A main focus was the consideration of the archaeological evidence for the effect of the synoecism of the Greek city centres in Epirus, Acharnania and Aetolia into this new central city. In which state were the Greek cities at the time of the synoecism and to which extent were the city sites abandoned in connection with the synoecism? What was the impact of the new metropolis on its wide ranging hinterland? How was the land of the former city centres administered?

The new evidence presented at the Symposium brings us a long step forward in our endeavour to answer these questions and suggests where to proceed with further investigations:

Strabo is our main source for the changes in the urban and political patterns in the area, brought about by the Romans, and Isager (University of Southern Denmark) takes up this controversial text. According to Strabo, Epirus was not part of Greece and its inhabitants were called *barbaroi*. The concept of *eremia*, desolation, emptiness, is likewise connected by Strabo with Epirus, sacked by Aemilius Paullus after 167 BC, and some scholars have taken the text at face value as evidence of an Epirotic landscape left in total emptiness. New archaeological evidence contradicts this, and doubt has been raised as to the validity of the information given by Strabo. Yet, as Isager argues, an analysis of Strabo's use of the concepts *barbaroi* and *eremia* shows that Strabo in other contexts uses them only to designate the less civilized, the less urbanized. The concepts are employed not only in descriptions of progress away from barbarism, but also in the reverse process where cities are reduced to mere villages. This reverse process took place in Epirus and civilization was only brought back to Epirus with the foundation of Nikopolis by Caesar Augustus. With this reading of Strabo, there seems to be no conflict be-



Nikopolis. View from the theatre. Drawing by Carl Haller von Hallerstein, 1810. Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire de Strassbourg.

tween Strabo and the evidence provided by the archaeological investigations.

The excavation of what was the most important construction in Nikopolis, the Victory Monument founded by Octavian at Nikopolis in memory of the battle of Actium in 31 BC, is presented in a preliminary report by Zachos, who is the leader of the excavation. The monument is situated on a hillside north of Nikopolis with a magnificent view to the Ionian Sea and the Ambracian Gulf, its main axis corresponding to the main axis in the city plan. The excavations have not only confirmed the description of the monument, given by Dio, but also given us much new and detailed information about this unique construction.

The monument is built on two terraces, supported by two retaining walls, facing south. Along the perimeter of the upper terrace a pi-shaped stoa opened to the south, forming an atrium. A kind of open-air sanctuary, a temenos was thus created. The southern facade of the podium opening to the lower terrace, carried a Latin inscription on its upper part and much of it has been preserved. Beneath this, the podium facade shows carved anchor-shaped sockets, which held bronze rams from ships captured in the battle, as many as 36 in all. A massive six and a half

kilo bronze fragment from a ram is what is left from them.

Various structures were discovered in the area within the pi-shaped stoa: two statue pedestals, and a monumental altar with fragments of a frieze, which suggests representations of battle and triumphal scenes. A large number of roof tiles with stamps and different types of terracotta revetments was found as well. One type shows a depiction of the *Lupa Romana* and the twins.

The monument thus constitutes at the same time a victorial monument and a sanctuary presumably dedicated to Apollo. The victorial monument is created in Roman tradition with a series of rams and an impressive triumphal inscription in Latin. The lay-out recalls the upper terrace of the Asclepieion on Kos and the Late Republican sanctuaries in Latium.

The Nikopolis Project, a joint Greek-American archaeological and geological survey of Southern Epirus, directed by James Wiseman from Boston University and Konstantinos Zachos of the 12 Ephoria of Antiquities in Ioannina, aimed broadly at understanding the changing relationship between humans and the landscape they exploited from prehistoric to mediaeval times. In his paper, Wiseman discusses the evidence for changes in the

landscape and for changing patterns of settlements from 2nd century BC through Late Antiquity. He also presents results of the investigations in areas which were affected by the synoecism connected with the foundation of Nikopolis. A program of geological and archaeological studies of the Northern coastal plain of the Ambracian Gulf has revealed the startling fact that the period from about 2,500 BC until the 5th century AD was a time of maximum marine intrusion into the Ambracian embayment, so that the northern shore of the gulf lay at the foot of the mountains. The floodplain which now extends some 12 km south to the shore of the gulf was created later. The survey did not include the plain of Arta (ancient Ambracia) and could not confirm the dating of the traces of centuriation found here, which has been connected with the founding of Nikopolis.

At the Nikopolis Peninsula the Mazoma embayment east of Nikopolis seems to have extended 500 meters further inland, thus creating a small harbour just outside the walls of Nikopolis. A more important harbour south-east of Nikopolis is found at the Ormos Vathy, an inlet from the Gulf, which in antiquity extended further inland. Here the harbour town has been identified, covering more than 16 ha. and a Roman bath has been found.

In the Lower Acheron Valley geological coring has given new evidence for the changes of the coastline and the creation of the Acherousian Lake. The site of Castris was chosen for a systematic urban survey. The preliminary conclusions of the survey show that there was no long-term deserted landscape in Roman times. Within a century after the founding of Nikopolis earlier sites were being revived and new sites grew up. Only from the 6th century AD is a reduction of population indicated.

An area close to Nikopolis, the Ayios Thomas Peninsula south east of the city, was investigated as part of the Nikopolis Project survey, and Stein (Boston University) presents in her paper the effects there from the foundation of the new urban

center. Substantial changes in land use took place, most radically a centuriation of at least the western part of the peninsula. The survey has identified Roman sites in this area and the location of these has been correlated with the already proposed centuriation system for the area south of Nikopolis. The sites located on the survey seem to fit into such a centuriation scheme. Farmsteads are found aligned with the rural network, among them one, which by its dating can confirm an Augustan date for centuriation scheme.

The Roman and late Antique ceramic material collected by the Nikopolis survey project is presented by Moore (Boston University) with double aim of reconstructing southern Epirote trade with Italy and other parts of the Mediterranean after 31 BC and showing evidence of a change in the production technology of cooking vessels before and after the foundation of Nikopolis. The distribution pattern of imported amphorae and tablewares is significantly different from that of locally produced coarsewares. The imported wares were found at large villa sites and in the harbour area near Nikopolis, while the local wares were more evenly distributed, even in areas where habitation is thought to have ended with the synoecism, thus showing a gradual resettlement. A shift in the selection of clay resources in the 1st century AD may indicate a political reorganisation of the region. During the Roman and Late Antique periods, a local production of coarse cooking-vessels and tablewares in imitations of popular forms imported from Italy, Asia Minor and North Africa is maintained. There is no evidence of amphora production, and the quantities of amphorae, though always rather small, increases from the 1st through the 5th centuries AD, showing increasing contact to the Mediterranean trade network.

Angeli and Katsadima from the Ephoria of Ioannina discuss two architectural structures of the Roman era on the coast of southern Epirus north of Nikopolis. The

frigidarium of a bathing complex, found near Riza and dated to the 3rd - 4th centuries, indicates the presence of a villa (*rustica*?) of a well-to-do landowner. The same conclusions can be drawn from the existence of a water reservoir recorded 3 km. south of Riza (now destroyed). It was in use from the mid 1st century AD to Byzantine times. Nearby a mausoleum has been partially excavated and fragments of sarcophagi have been found. It can be dated to the 2nd century AD. The bath and the mausoleum testify to the existence of a sizable landed estate and represent a prosperous elite presence in the countryside. The basis of its owners wealth has not yet been revealed, but surely land exploitation formed part of it. An interesting question is: do these complexes indicate Roman presence here or were the owners Greeks, adopting Roman building customs? We have no indication. Possibly, the landlords had their residence in nearby Nikopolis, and to draw conclusions from the epigraphical material found here, it had an almost exclusively Greek population.

A presentation of the results of the Greek-German investigations of Kassope, the city in whose territory Nikopolis was founded, is made by Schwandner (DAI, Berlin). The city was established as a *synoikismos* of the Kassopaeans just before the middle of the 4th century BC seemingly with the city-plan of colonial, coastal cities in southern Italy and Sicily as a model. The city seems to have been affected by the destructions and plunderings of Aemilius Paulus after 167 BC. The municipal Katakogion and the Prytaneion were destroyed by fire, but no destruction level was recognizable in the city's private houses. As shown in the paper by Gravani, the stratigraphical material suggests an abrupt decline in the city's population after 167 BC. Around 140 BC, the situation seems to have stabilized and the city flourished until the foundation of Nikopolis in the territory of the Kassopaeans, who were then forced to leave their homes and resettle in the new city.

They brought with them their statues of heroes and honourable citizens, and even the temple of the city goddess Aphrodite seems to have been transferred to Nikopolis. The total absence of any statue fragments in the Agora and of even the smallest fragment of the temple's superstructure seem to indicate this. Only one house of the 12 excavated shows further use in the first century AD. Kassope remained abandoned until the Late Medieval period.

One group of finds from Cassope, the mould made relief bowls is discussed by Gravani (University of Ioannina) in connection with the establishment of a stratigraphical chronology. Around 1981 fragments and pieces and a few whole mould made bowls were recovered during the excavations. The appearance of relief bowls in Cassope at the end of the 3rd century coincides with their diffusion in other Hellenistic centres. Locally produced mould made bowls represent about 80% of this category of vases. The clay came from local deposits. It has been possible to distinguish six groups according to their characteristic decorative patterns. Three of them point to the existence of three different workshops and the other three are related to workshop groups. Workshop A seems to have formed a common repertoire, enriched or imitated by the workshop B and the workshop group. The production peak for workshop A and B is dated before 167 BC, a period in which Cassope enjoyed independence from the Epirotic League. Thus, the use of decorated relief bowls, presumably imitating bowls made of precious metal or glass, reflects a desire to display luxury. The activity of workshop C is dated after 167 BC. It has a different repertoire and it reflects probably the settling of new inhabitants in Cassope. The production of locally made bowls ceased in late 2nd century BC and the greatest number of imported ones date to this period. In the 1st century BC relief bowls were replaced by other kinds of drinking vessels.

The island and city of Leucas, south of Nikopolis, is another locality affected by the synoecism. Building both on earlier investigations and recent ones made by the Archaeological Service of Ioannina, Pliakou from this Ephoria discusses the history of Roman Leucas and shows that the suggestion, based on Strabo, that Leucas was left “deserted” after the foundation of Nikopolis cannot be confirmed by the archaeological evidence, which demonstrates that inhabitation of the urban area inside the walls of the city of Leucas continued at least until the 1st century AD. Only from that time is it likely that the population gradually decreased. A Roman grave found inside the walls indicates a change in or collapse of the city structure. This change is further shown by a recent discovery of a large farmhouse between the city walls and the northern cemetery. Roman graves attested almost only in this cemetery indicate human presence until the 3rd century AD. Pliakou concludes that the city’s key position at the channel between Leucas and the mainland on the sea route which gives safe passage from Nikopolis to centres like Patras and Corinth, was the conclusive factor for the continuation of inhabitation in Leucas.

The great task of collecting the evidence from all the sites in Epirus where remains can be dated to the Roman period, that is from the 2nd century BC until late antiquity, is taken up by Karatzeni (Ephoria of Ioannina). The material presented by her confirms that the foundation of Nikopolis did not result in total abandonment of the former settlements in the hinterland. Ambracia is pointed out as a city, which seems to have been inhabited until the 4th century AD, yet in reduced conditions. The general picture of southern Epirus that emerges from her investigation is the following. In the period of Roman domination, the mountainous areas were abandoned and the settlements, for the most part small unwallled villages, were gathered at the coast and in the plains, at the river basins and at the main roads. The number of urban centres was small. Of the earlier

centres only Ambracia seems to have survived. A final abandonment, caused by barbaric invasions, of most of the cities and settlements in the area, took place in the 6th century AD. Only Nikopolis survived for four more centuries.

Butrint (Bouthroton) situated in the southwestern part of the Epirotic region of Chaonia (now the southernmost part of modern Albania), at the coast opposite the island of Corfu, is the theme for the paper by Ceka (University of Tirana). He describes the development of the city from an Corcyrean emporium in the 7th century BC until it became a Roman colony at the time of Augustus. It avoided destruction by Aemilius Paulus and preserved its institutions. The process of its transformation into a Roman colony, begun by Caesar and completed by Augustus, is documented by literary sources as well as by archaeological data (e.g. an Augustan aqueduct and the rebuilding of the Prytaneion in *opus reticulatum*), showing a change of political institutions and a new organisation of public space, and a different pattern in the agrarian territory. It has not been possible to indicate any specific effects on Butrint from the foundation of Nikopolis and the synoecism. A new road connecting the two cities may be dated to the times of Hadrian and further studies of the architectural remnants of both cities may reveal a closer connection at that period.

The ancient polis Stratos in Acarnania is another city affected by the Nikopolitaeon synoecism. In recent years it has been investigated through a Greek-German excavation and survey project. Stratos is situated in a wide fertile plain, the Stratiké, close to the river Acheloos. With a city-wall (5th century BC) of almost 8 km in length, it was one of the largest towns in Northwestern Greece. Its city area seems to have been reduced with a *diateichisma*-wall only with Roman occupation after 168 BC or perhaps in connection with the foundation of Nikopolis and the installation of a Roman colony at Patras.

Funke (Universität Münster) describes the purpose, methods, and results of the excavations in Stratos and of the Stratiké Surface Project, which have been carried out in close collaboration with Lazaros Kolonas of the Ephoria of Patras. The excavations on the Agora have revealed that the major part of the public buildings here date to the late 4th century BC. As to the Roman period, a small altar with an attachment-ring for sacrificial animals, dating to 2nd – 4th century AD, is – apart from a few coins and potsherd – the only evidence from this period found inside the city walls. It is suggested that a new unfortified centre was created 3 km southwest of Stratos, where a Roman bath has been found. A general change in the urbanistic pattern from pre-Roman fortified settlements to non-fortified settlements on lower elevations in the Roman period is discussed in the paper by Lang. The maps of the distribution of sites, given by her, show a change in the land use, but the continuity seems not to have been totally disrupted by the Nikopolitaeon synoecism and the new colony at Patras. There is also evidence for a revival of activities in many settlements during the early Imperial era.

The city-excavations have revealed that the theatre has well preserved parts of the orchestra and of the stage-building with access from both sides through ramps. It shows three building-phases during the 4th and 3rd century BC and gives important information on the development of the Greek theatre. The stratigraphical data from the city-excavation have delivered a foundation for the dating of the material from the Stratiké survey, which covered an area of about 100 square km. Among the 133 sites, from the Greek and Roman period, already located, the site Spathari stands out because of the discovery of well preserved, decorated roof elements from an Archaic temple (550/40 BC) and elements from a later Hellenistic phase (2nd – 1st centuries BC) as well.

The paper of Lang (Universität Rostock) is dedicated to methodological considera-

tions related to the Stratiké survey and she discusses various dimensions of topography in relation to the development in the Stratiké. Problems when dealing with continuity and discontinuity at an intersite level and well as at an intrasite level are pointed out. She looks at the distribution of the sites occupied one (the majority) to five times, and reflects on the closing down of places in different areas. On the intrasite level, the continuity and discontinuity can be viewed in temporal and functional changes. A more specific method of site-function-analysis is defined based chiefly on the examination of pottery with the aim to establish different categories of function. Sites with the same function are assumed to produce the same set of ceramics in an analogous-comparative model.

Freitag (Universität Münster) is part of an international team of epigraphists, who have as their objective to collect and study all the epigraphical material from ancient Acarnania. The first step in this program is a registration of the epigraphic material in the museums of Agrinion and Thyreion. In his paper Freitag relates the history of the epigraphic investigations in the area and gives a report on the current work, pointing out the more important inscriptions. Milestones which have been found allow us a view into the Roman infrastructure in the area, providing evidence for a Roman road system in Acarnania from the first century AD, shortly after the foundation of Nikopolis. At the museum of Thyreion are found the well-known inscriptions mentioning Roman-Aetolian treaties of alliance from 212 BC and 94 BC, which, apart from their historical value may lead to a better interpretation of treaties between Rome and other Greek cities. Ancient Thyreion is named among the cities annexed to Nikopolis and expectedly it is assumed to have been deserted after the synoecism. The existence of a relatively large number of epitaphs from the Roman period forces a reconsideration of this. The reorganizing of the area and the settlement policy after 30 BC

seems to have been rather more complex than suggested by the sources.

The last two contributions investigate the distribution of cults and the pattern for placing sanctuaries in Northwestern Greece. The development and the changes found in the cults reflect the transformation of the regions.

The transfer of cult, cult-statues, and even temples has been connected with the Nikopolitean synoecism and Apollo came to enjoy a special position as the god who favoured the side of Octavian in the sea battle at Actium and secured the emperor's victory. Tzouvara-Souli (University of Ioannina) presents the history of the cult-places of Apollo in Northwestern Greece, demonstrating their affinities and the enduring existence of the worship of Apollo from the Archaic to the Roman period. The most famous Apollo sanctuaries were found in the colonies established by Corinth in Northwestern Greece (Ambracia and Apollonia being the most important) and it spread from there to the areas affected by Corinthian influence. After Actium and the Nikopolitean synoecism, the local cults of Apollo were transformed radically. The cult, its symbols, and the festival games at Nikopolis obtained new importance not only in Greece, but in most parts of the Roman Empire. As a protector of Octavian, Apollo Actius was given a place on the Palatine in Rome close to the dwelling of the Emperor.

Houby-Nielsen (University of Lund) from the Danish Kato Vasiliki (ancient Chalkis) Project in Aetolia, has studied the tradition and the pattern for placing sanctuaries in Aetolia and she extends her area of investigation to Achaia, where the city of Patras was made the centre of Augustus' largescale synoecism policy. We are told by Pausanias that the Aetolian people were to be incorporated in Nikopolis, and images from Aetolia and Acarnania was brought to this city. Yet, some important cults and cult statues (Artemis Laphria and Dionysos) were transferred from Aetolian Kalydon to

Patras. Houby-Nielsen suggests that Augustus here acted in respect of the significance which former non-urban cults had to the Aetolians and Acharnians. She documents the fact that from the Geometric to the early Hellenistic period the most solid evidence for sacred architecture stems from cults, placed outside nucleated settlements, and even when the monumentalization of urban functions increased including city walls, the most costly temples were found outside city walls or close to these. Cults such as those for Artemis, Dionysus and Demeter, originating in smaller rural communities, seem to have been maintained after a synoecism as unprotected cults outside the city-walls and may have been regarded as vital for new cities.

The excavations at Aetolian Chalkis have given no evidence for habitation in the Roman period, so it must be assumed that the inhabitants of this city were transferred to Nikopolis or, more likely, to Patras, situated on the opposite shore of the Corinthian Gulf.

The last contribution brings us to the southern limits of the area, which was affected by foundation of Nikopolis. This area also formed part of the hinterland of Patras, another city taken into consideration by Augustus in his plans for centralizing the population into few administrative centres. I want to conclude this introduction by stressing the difference in the models of organization, exemplified in the these two cities.

In the case of Patras a Roman colony was installed in an already existing Greek city, which at the same time was made centre for a synoecism of Greek settlements in the surrounding region. A city with a mixed population of Greeks and Romans was thus created.

In the case of Nikopolis another model was used. A new city, built in Roman design, a metropol with all its facilities, was founded in the plain, in an open position between the Ionian Sea and the Ambracian Gulf. By synoecism it received a Greek population transferred from surrounding Greek city-settlements. Thus,

Nikopolis was created as a Greek city with a population which may have amounted to around 90.000. It was called Nikopolis, a city of Victory and a symbol of peace, and, as its fate has shown us, peace was a prerequisite for its existence.

Finally, I want to thank all the speakers who from their different angles have given their contribution to the common theme. All the evidence, brought together here for the first time, has given us an overall and nuanced picture of the very complex process of transformation, which took place in Northwestern Greece in the Roman period.

My thanks go as well to the other par-

ticipants in the Symposium, who made their contributions in creating many fruitful discussions. We all want to express our gratitude to the Danish Humanities Research Council and the Carlsberg Foundation for their support of the symposium and for providing together with Landsdommer V. Gieses Fond and the University of Southern Denmark the economic basis for the printing of the acts and, finally, to the Director of the Danish Institute at Athens, Signe Isager, for accepting them as a volume in the Institute's series of monographs. Robin Lorsch Wildfang is thanked for revising the English translations.

