Leukas in the Roman period

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During the historical times, Leukas was part of ancient Akarnania,¹ although it was inhabited by the Corinthians² in the 7th century BC. Geographically, the island is linked with the Akarnanian coast, from which it is separated only by a narrow and shallow sea area. Before the Corinthians settled in the island, the Akarnanians were its indigenous inhabitants.³

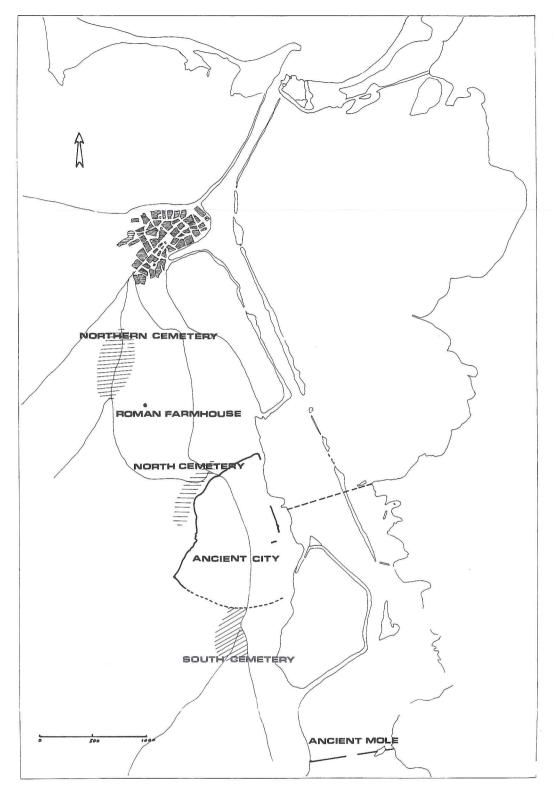
The association of Leukas with the Akarnanian cities is concluded around 230 BC, when it becomes the seat of the Akarnanian Koinon. Thus, during the period that follows, which coincides with the appearance of Romans in the area and their involvement in the long-lasting conflict between Aetolians and Akarnanians, 4 the island's historical course is parallel to and interdependent with that of the neighbouring Akarnanian cities.

At the outbreak of the second Macedonian War (200-197 BC), the Akarnanians form an alliance with the Macedonian King Philip V. In 197 BC, Leukas as the seat of the Akarnanian Koinon, after refusing to accede to the Romans, is besieged and is eventually conquered by Lucius Quintus Flamininus. Livy,5 in his extended description of the siege, refers to the stout resistance of the Leukadians and their constant efforts to repair the attacked walls and attributes the take-over of the city to the treachery of exiled Italians who lived in Leukas. After the defeat of Phillip V at Kynoscephalae a few months later and the declaration of freedom for the Greek cities in Corinth by Titus Quinctius Flamininus, Roman guards do not settle in the island and Leukas retains its position in the still existing Akarnanian Koinon. After the defeat of Perseus at Pydna in 168 BC, Romans appoint Thyrreion as the seat of the

Koinon and exempt Leukas, which becomes independent and mints its own coins.6 This act might have possibly been an attempt of Rome to undermine the Akarnanian Koinon by appointing as its seat the city being on the "friendliest" terms with the Romans and to control directly Leukas.7 From this point onwards, until the foundation of Nikopolis, Leukas maintains only typically its independence as a civitas libera, even though in reality, it remains under Roman control. During the 1st half of the 1st century BC, the Akarnanian coasts suffer from pirates looting the sanctuaries of Apollo in Actium and in Leukas. From the middle of the 1st century BC, Romans use the island as a naval base during their ventures and civil conflicts in the area: just before the naval battle in Actium, Agrippa occupies the island in order to use it as a naval base against Antonius. After 31 BC, Leukas along with other Akarnanian cities is established as a dependency of the newly founded Nikopolis. In 27 BC, it belongs along with Akarnania to the Roman province of Achaia, whereas from the period of Traian, it becomes part of the province of Epirus, where Nikopolis is the seat.

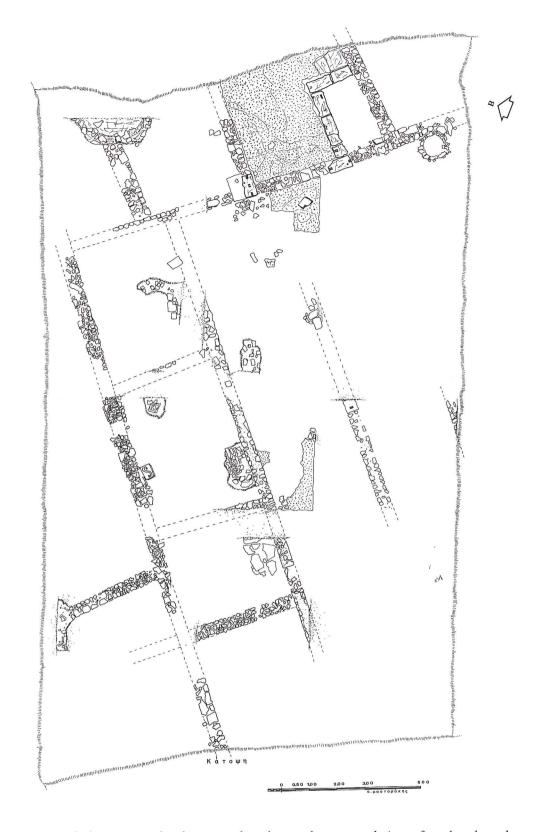
After the foundation of Nikopolis, the information on Leukas provided by the written sources is only occasional. The last reference to Leukas as a city, is given by Strabo, who includes it in the *perioikides* of Nikopolis.⁸ Athenaeus, towards the end of the 2nd century AD, believes that Leukadian wine causes a headache due to its mixture with plaster,⁹ while Claudius Aelianus gives a description of a peculiar Leukadian fishing method.¹⁰ Nevertheless, while there are just a few recollections

Fig. 1. The area of the ancient city Leukas and its cemeteries.



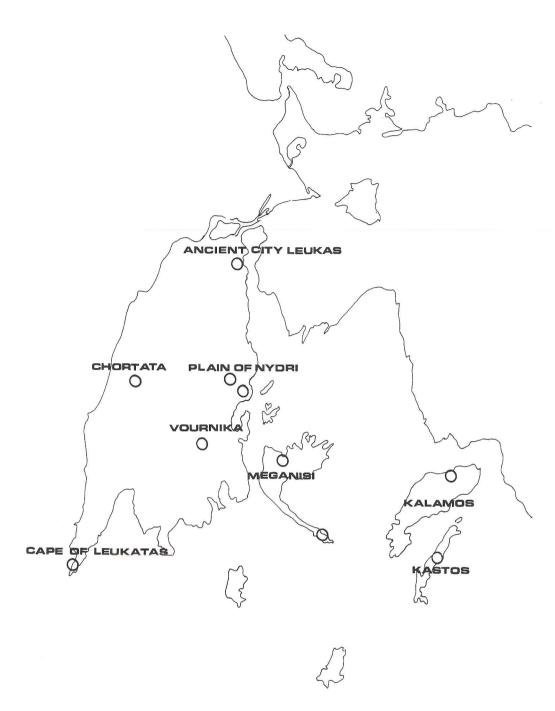
about the island itself, much more frequent are the written references about the canal, the narrow and shallow sea passage which enabled ships to sail through the area between the island and the Akarnanian coasts. The Corinthian settlers in Leukas opened the canal for the first time in the 7th or 6th century BC, thus, making access to the city's safe port possible from the north. It also became one of the main sea passages across the Ionian Sea, ensuring both the communication between the an-

Fig. 2. Ground plan of the Roman farmhouse.



cient ports of Akarnania and a shorter and safer journey in relation to the longer sailing around the western coasts of Leukas. Its opening gave to a large extent, a boost for the development of the ancient city as a center of commerce. From time to time, due to the accumulation of sand and mud, this passage would get blocked and therefore, would not operate until it had been cleaned. 11 As becomes known by written sources, it was navigable when Philip passed through with his fleet during the

Fig. 3. Map of Leukas and its neighbouring islands Meganisi, Kalamos and Kastos.



expedition against the Aetolians in 218 BC, and yet, it was probably closed in 197 BC. In 50 BC, Cicero, when returning from Patras, sailed through the canal whereas, a year earlier he had to sail around the island. In the time of Augustus, sailing through the canal must have been extremely difficult, as Livy, Strabo and Ovidius confirm. As Hyginus, the librarian and freedman of Augustus informs us, small crafts called *paktones* would pull the larger merchant ships through the canal.

In addition to this, according to Pliny, the canal silted up once more during the 1st century AD and did not operate until the middle of the 2nd century AD. According to Arrian, channel markers were employed in the canal area in order to mark the passageway. Finally, the canal area is mentioned as a station (called *per diorycto*) on the main sea route shown on the map of the 4th century AD, known as Tabula Peutingeriana.¹²

The existing gap in the written evi-



Fig. 4. The northern cemetery of ancient Leukas: a cist grave containing burials from the classical to the Roman periods.

dence about the history of Leukas during the first early Christian centuries, is covered by the archaeological evidence: the excavations conducted by W. Dörpfeld in the beginning of the 20th century and more recent studies of the Archaeological Service, indicate that the area of the ancient capital (Fig.1) and other sites on the island (Fig. 3.) were inhabited until the 4th century AD, attesting that after the foundation of Nikopolis, Leukas is not "deserted", as Strabo mentions.¹³

The earliest data regarding the Roman presence on the ancient city coincide with the period of its conquest. Its dramatic siege by Lucius Flamininus was traced during the excavation of a public building

related to commercial activities and the storage of goods, which was situated outside the fortification walls of the city and very close to the port. The conditions that led to the violent collapse of the building were confirmed by the discovery of a stone bullet on its destruction layer, dating to the beginning of the 2nd century BC. ¹⁴

The occurrence of construction activity after the city's seizure by the Romans is testified by two identical building inscriptions found very close to the wall, by the sea: A Π O Λ A Ω NIATAI OIKO Δ O-MH Σ AN. ¹⁵ These inscriptions, engraved on 2 large blocks, date to the 2^{nd} or even the 1^{st} century BC¹⁶ and indicate the partial reconstruction of the walls or the erection of a building related to the commercial activities of the Apollonians.

The archaeological data collected particularly within the last decade of the recent rescue excavations by the Archaeological Service, verify that the inhabitance of the urban area inside the walls continues at least until the 1st century AD., as shown by the extended complexes of private dwellings found in two plots, at the central and southeast boarder of the ancient city. In both cases, the units of adjacent houses that have been investigated were placed in oblong insulae arranged on either side of drainage alleys, and seem to have been occupied from the early 5th century BC to the late Hellenistic period. However, pottery dated to the 1st century AD17 that was found in the archaeological deposits overlaying the architectural remains, substantiates the contemporary use of the area.

Finally, the traveler Dodwell had recognized a Roman phase in the city walls, ¹⁸ whereas a solar clock found outside the eastern part of the walls, ¹⁹ dates to the Roman period as well.

According to the up-to-date archaeological evidence, the city's northern cemetery consists of two sections (Fig. 1). One section is situated immediately outside the walls, where the areas of Kalligonion and Fragoklissia are located today. A second

Fig. 5. Roman farmhouse: section of the main wing.



more extended section of the cemetery is located further north, at a distance of approximately 2 kilometres from the wall, in Tsechlibou area. According to the archaeological evidence found so far, the ancient cemetery in the area of Fragoklissia, is mainly used during the archaic and classical periods, while no graves were found dating to the Roman period. Respectively, it appears that the city's south cemetery, extending outside the southern part of the walls, was deserted by the end of the 2nd century BC. Only the city's northern cemetery, in the area of Tsechlibou, remains in constant use until the Roman period, where the number of graves dating to the first early-Christian centuries is much smaller than the number of earlier graves. The Roman graves are not located in a specific area within the cemetery. On the contrary, they are found scattered along with earlier.20 In certain cases, burials dated to the 1st, 2nd and 3rd centuries AD are placed in cist graves of the classical or Hellenistic period, within earlier burials (Fig. 4.), while in other cases, Roman tile graves are constructed at a higher level. Lamps with relief decoration, Aretine pottery, unguentaria and even coins accompa-

ny the dead. Finally, inside the walls of the city, a built Roman grave was discovered among deserted Hellenistic houses.²¹

The city's port, a project of the Corinthian settlers, which is protected on the south part by an ancient mole extending up to the Akarnanian coast, as shown by the numerous amphora sherds of the 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 5th centuries found in the western branch of the ancient mole,22 is used until the 5th century AD. These vessels that had apparently fallen to the mole during the unloading of commercial ships, fairly reveal the time period during which the port had been operating. Finally, according to Dionysius of Halikarnassus,²³ the temple of Aphrodite Aineias was situated at the broader area of the ancient city, on a small island north of the canal.24

An inscription published for the first time in 1752,²⁵ which is presently missing, was included among the Roman finds from the city. The inscription is believed to have been an honorary one: the person honored by the city of Leukas was the emperor Hadrian who – as known – had visited Nikopolis three times. However, according to more recent studies, it is

Fig. 6. Roman farmhouse: the wing of the utility rooms.

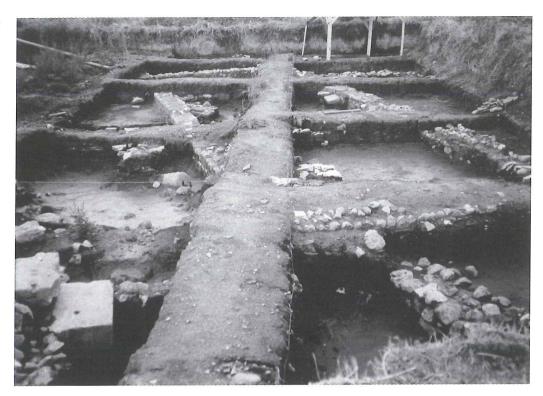


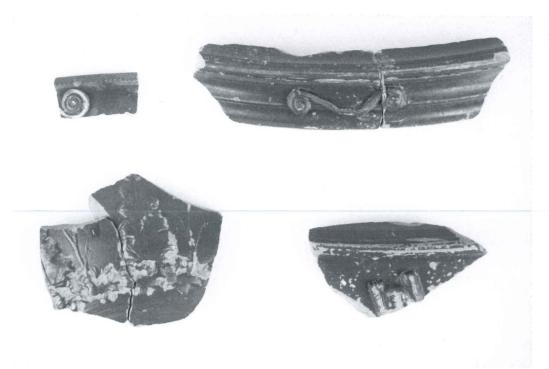


Fig. 7. Roman farmhouse: detail of masonry.

claimed that the restoration of the text on the inscription is incorrect. 26

New data about the social and economic structure in the broader area of the city during the Roman era have been provided by the discovery of a large building complex²⁷ during a recent rescue excavation. The building is located in the area of Megali Vrissi, between the city's walls and the northern cemetery, to which it is closer (Fig. 1). During the investigation of the building, two construction phases were recognized. It is likely that the space ar-

Fig. 8. Roman farmhouse: terra sigillata pottery.



rangement is partly similar in the two phases, since many walls of the first construction phase are used as a sub-foundation for the subsequent ones.

A large section of the building's more recent construction phase has been excavated, even though its external boarders have not yet been exposed (Fig. 2). The areas that were investigated are allocated into two wings: the main wing on the NE section of the building and the SW wing of the utility rooms. In the main wing 4 rooms were partially investigated. In the central room, the preserved floor is made of hydraulic cement (Fig. 5), while the walls are built of large limestone blocks in second use.

In the SW section of the house, the building's utility rooms are situated, allocated into elongate wings about 3.5 m. wide and greater than 15 m long (Fig. 6). A long corridor, on the one side of which a monolithic threshold was found *in situ*, ensured the communication with the wings extending on either side. In these wings, vertical walls built at intervals, form a series of adjoining rooms, the finds of which (bronze hooks, bone pins, lead and stone weights and tools) define the function of these areas as utility ones and indi-

cate the inhabitants' occupation with fishing and rural activities. All the walls of the SW wing are built of roughly hewn stones and tile sherds, gripped with a thick layer of mortar (Fig. 6, 7), whereas, the fact that brick masonry is not commonly applied should be associated with its subsidiary usage. The building materials used in the Roman farmhouse also indicate that in the case of Leukas, the Roman buildings are not necessarily built of brick masonry, as there were abundant ancient materials that could be re-used in Roman constructions.

As indicated by the large dimensions of the building, its space arrangement and location in the plain area outside the walls by the sea, in combination with the nature of the finds, the building is identified as a farmhouse.²⁸ According to the finds, the building had been in use from the 1st century BC until at least the end of the 2nd century AD. The finds consist of terra sigillata pottery (Fig. 8), relief lamps (Fig. 9) and glass vessels (Fig. 10), denoting the financial prosperity of the inhabitants. After all, a bronze coin of Nikopolis dated to the time of Hadrian that depicts Artemis on its reverse side, is included among other coins. Nevertheless, the ongoing ex-



Fig. 9. Roman farmhouse: lamp with relief decoration.

cavation will provide us with more data about the structure and function of the farmhouse.

The evidence briefly aforementioned attributes to the recomposition of the ancient city's picture during the Roman period. Inside the walls, inhabitance is ascertained to exist until the 1st century AD and yet, it is most likely that population gradually decreases and inhabitance in the ancient city is confined to specific areas, until the city is eventually deserted. After all, the built Roman grave found among earlier architectural remains, indicates the collapse of the city's planning system. It is most likely that the phase of the fortification wall made of brick and mortar within the stones, which - according to the traveler Dodwell - dates to the Roman period,29 is the medieval citadel30 built inside the ancient city, even by using a part of the ancient wall.

Furthermore, it is suggested that while the city inside the walls is not deserted, Roman farmhouses start emerging in the plain area outside the walls, at a small distance from the sea from as early as the 1st century BC. Respectively, in the Akarnanian rural area³¹ and at the coasts of

Epirus, similar installations are founded by the "Synepirotai".32 The Roman graves located on the city's northern cemetery, the finds from which attest to the human presence within the broader area until the 3rd cent. AD, probably belong to the inhabitants of these buildings. Besides, one should bear in mind that the northern cemetery lies at a great distance from the city and closer to the area of the Roman farmhouse. The settlement of the Romans in Leukas is also suggested by the names of the dead being inscribed on two presently missing tombstones probably coming from the city's cemeteries: ΙΟΥΛΙΑ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΑ ΕΤΩΝ Θ XAIPE³³ and $\Pi O \Pi \Lambda \{IO\Sigma\}$ BET $\{EPO\Sigma\}EY\{TYXOY\}.^{34}$

Further signs of inhabitance on the island during the Roman period are traced in other sites as well. The second in density location, where human activity is confirmed to exist during this period, is the plain of Nydri, on the island's east coast, about 15 kilometers south of the ancient city (Fig. 3). The whole plain area and also the foot of mountain Skaros and the surrounding hills were investigated systematically during the years 1901-1913 by W. Dörpfeld in an attempt to trace Homeric Ithaca. According to the results of the study published by the German archaeologist, in the areas that were investigated, remains such as walls, house tiles, Greek-Roman pottery and graves, dating to the classical and Roman times,35 prove the inhabitance of the northern and western parts of the valley during this period.

On the northern part of the valley, a wall supporting the torrent Dimossari³⁶ was discovered dating to the Roman or Byzantine period. It should be also noted that a Roman building was excavated on the SW boarder of the plain, at the foot of the hill where the settlement of Paliokatouna³⁷ is situated. In the location "Steno", south of the burial tombs of the Early Bronze Age, sections of a wall were discovered, dating to the Roman or a subsequent period, protecting the area from the plain's³⁸ southern torrent.

Apart from the scattered architectural remains, numerous Roman tile graves³⁹ were also investigated not only in the same area south of the tombs, but also in the position of building P, where - according to the excavator - a Mycenaean palace must have been located. Roman burials were also excavated above graves R840 and R26.41 Between the graves, a wall of the same period⁴² passes through. The Roman graves of "Steno", which were of a maximum length 1.80 m. and width 0.40 m., were directed from East to West and in some cases included 2 burials. even though their majority did not contain any funeral items. Only Roman bronze coins and fragments of lamps from the 4th - 5th centuries43 AC are included among the few finds.

Similar graves were excavated in the northern part of the plain, on the slopes of mountain Skaros. One of the graves contained coins depicting the emperor Lucius Verus and a clay lamp signed by KARPOS.44 Based on the potter's signature, the pot has been identified as the creation of a workshop in Roman Patras, which apparently exported its products to Leukas⁴⁵ in the 2nd century AD. The rest of the graves contained bronze coins, including a coin of the emperor Marcus Aurelius and clay lamps of the 3rd century AD.46 Finally, a group of 5 cist graves was traced and investigated during the more recent research conducted by the Archaeological Service on the plain's western edge in the torrent Dimossari. 47 The better-preserved grave, as derives from its archaeological contents, dates to the time of Augustus.

Apart from the excavated evidence, Roman appearance on this site is fairly suggested by a large group of coins found during Dörpfeld's investigations on the island, currently held at the Archaeological Museum of Ioannina. Some of these coins date to the Republic, the time of Augustus and other Emperors and to subsequent periods. Even though there is little evidence about their origin, it is assumed that a significant sample of the coins originates from the plain of Nydri, since this was the



Fig. 10. Roman farmhouse: glass unguentarium.

site where the German archaeologist focused his investigation.

All the data stated above, indicate that the fertile plain of Nydri, inhabited ever since the Early Bronze Age due to its advantageous location, is also inhabited during the Roman period. Presently, there is no trace of extensive architectural remains, thus the investigation of the settlement's structure during the Roman period appears to be difficult. Nevertheless, the arrangement of grave groups leads to the assumption that detached building complexes of a rural character are also developed in this area.

Indications of the Roman period have also been traced in other locations of Leukas and the adjacent islands. In the area of the village Vournika, the excavation of the ancient temple, which still exists under the foundations of the church of St.

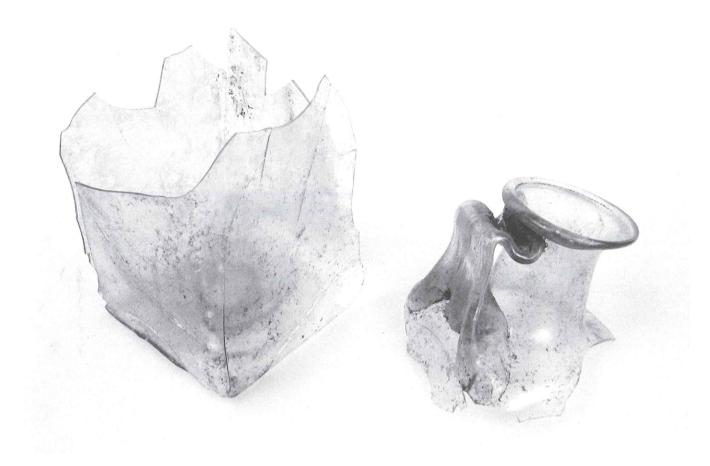


Fig. 11. Meganisi, area of Spartochori: glass vessel from the Roman cist grave.

Ioannis Rodakis,⁴⁸ revealed a few Roman finds, while at the edge of the plain of Vasiliki, a tombstone was found bearing the inscription: $\Pi OM\Pi HIO\Sigma$ NEIKIA $\Delta\Delta\Sigma$.⁴⁹

During the Roman period, it is evident that apart from the sanctuary of Aphrodite Aineias, the sanctuary of Apollo Leukatas also survives, built on the remote cape of Leukatas at the far south end of the island. The depiction of Apollo Leukatas on a rare coin of Nikopolis dated to the time of Traian, mirrors the spreading of the Apollonian worship from the settlement⁵⁰ to Nikopolis. It may also suggest the continuation of the sanctuary's use in Leukas in the beginning of the 2nd century AD, since pottery and coins of the Roman period were found in the area of the sanctuary.⁵¹

Finally, in a small rural sanctuary at the village of Chortata, among the finds from

the geometric period, a clay lamp dated to the 2nd century AD was found with a depiction of gladiators on its discus.⁵²

Finds of the Roman period were also traced outside the island, on the neighboring islands of Meganisi, Kastos and Kalamos, situated in the sea area between Leukas and Akarnania. At the cape of Kefali in Meganisi, tile fragments were found⁵³, whereas on the NW side of the island, in the location Paliolakos near Spartochori, a cist Roman grave was investigated (Fig. 11).54 On the other two islands, architectural remains of brick masonry were detected dating to the Roman or early Christian period.⁵⁵ The Roman presence on these sites should be associated with their location in the main sea passage linking Nikopolis with Patras.

The significance of the sea passage along the coasts of the Adriatic and the Ionian Sea during the period of the Roman Empire has already been pointed out.56 A part of the passage starting off from Nikopolis ensures the communication via the canal with the other two Roman centres of the area, Patras and Corinth, and provides the possibility of calling at the port of Aetoloakarnania for supplies and transportation of goods. Nikopolis, as the capital of the province of Epirus with administrative jurisdiction on Aetoloakarnania, might have contributed to the maintenance of the canal. The key position of Leukas as a coastal station on this sea passage appears to be a conclusive factor for the continuation of its inhabitance after the foundation of Nikopolis. Its agricultural production continues, probably controlled by wealthy Roman landowners. The discovery of mercantile

amphoras at the port indicates the existence of commercial activity within the process of transportation of goods from the inland to the large Roman centres and the coasts of Italy.

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Notes

NOTE 1 Strab. 10.2.2.

NOTE 2 Thuc. 3.94.2.

NOTE 3 Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 1.50.4

bibliography can be found.

NOTE 4
Petropoulos 1991, 94–97, where relevant

NOTE 5 Liv. 33.13ff.

NOTE 6 BMC Thessaly to Aetolia 1963, 179-188.

NOTE 7 Murray 1982, 358-360.

NOTE 8 Strab. 10.2.2.

NOTE 9 Ath., *Epit.* 1.33 b

NOTE 10 Ael., NA 13,19.

NOTE 11

Murray 1982, 243-247, where all the sources relevant to the periods in which navigation of the canal was possible can be found.

NOTE 12

Axioti 1980, 197- 205. As Axioti accurately points out, the name of the station that is mentioned in T.P, should be read as "per diorycto" (through the canal) rather than "Perdiorycto", as a place-name. The view of Murray that the station should be located on Peratia in Aetoloakarnania is not supported adequately. The choice of the already organised port of Leukas as a station would be more reasonable, since it is indicated that during that period the port of Leukas was still in operation (Murray 1982, pp. 241 and 435-436).

NOTE 13

Strabo refers to the "Ακαρνάνων ερημία" (8.8.1). Additionally, according to more recent studies, it is believed that after the foundation of Nikopolis, there is no sign of any human activity in the area of the ancient city. See Fiedler 1999, 425-426, Strauch 1996, 315. This approach is however overturned by recent archaeological data. Ambracia as well, constitutes a respective exemple of a city which continues to exist after the foundation of Nikopolis. See Karatzeni 1999, 241-247.

NOTE 14 Douzougli 1993a, 290-293.

NOTE 15 IG 10.1. 535, 536.

NOTE 16 Strauch 1997, 240.

note 17 Douzougli 1993b, 293–300.

NOTE 18 Dodwell 1819, 50.

NOTE 19 Touloupa 1973-74, 589.

NOTE 20 Zachos 1992, 281-285. Douzougli 1994, in

NOTE 21 Douzougli 1993c, 287.

NOTE 22 Murray 1982, 241, 435- 436.

NOTE 23 Dion. Hal. Ant. Rom. 1.50.4

NOTE 24 According to Dodwell (see Dodwell 1819, 50), the temple of Aphrodite had been replaced by the Christian church of St. Nicolo – in the homonymous island- in the walls of which are some fragmented marbles and architectural remains. Rondogiannis (see Rondogiannis 1980, 256-257) identifies the island mentioned by Dion. Hal. with "Vardacosta".

NOTE 25 IG 10.1. 540. Stamatelos 1868, 1661. Oberhummer 1887, 275.

NOTE 26 Strauch 1996, 312, where relevant bibliography can be found.

NOTE 27 Pliakou 1997/98, in press.

NOTE 28
The ground plan of the farmhouse and its space arrangement share similarities with the Roman villa rustica in Stroggylli, in the coast of the Ambracian Gulf. See Douzougli 1998, 74–78.

NOTE 29 Dodwell 1819, 51.

NOTE 30 Rondogiannis 1980, 267-274.

NOTE 31 Petropoulos 1991, 120.

NOTE 32 Sarikakis 1964, 112-114. Dakaris 1987, 20. The Cossini family from Puteoli is among the Italian landowners that settled in the coasts of Epirus from as early as the 1st cent. BC. The evidence that derives from the inscriptions found, indicates the presence of the same family also in Leukas. See Strauch 1996, 311.

NOTE 33 IG 10.1, 596. Stamatelos 1868, 1671.

NOTE 34 IG 10.1, 596. Stamatelos 1868, 1671.

NOTE 35 Dörpfeld 1965, 160-161.

NOTE 36 Dörpfeld 1965, 193 Abb 7, 194.

NOTE 37 Dörpfeld 1965, 163, II Taf. 10.

NOTE 38 Dörpfeld 1965, 177, 195 Abb 8.

NOTE 39 Drpfeld 1965, 250, II Taf. 12, 255.

NOTE 40 Dörpfeld 1965, 229, 249, 255.

NOTE 41 Dörpfeld 1965, 244 Abb 20, 245 Abb 21, 247, 249, 255.

NOTE 42 Dörpfeld 1965, 250 Abb 19. NOTE 43 IG 10.1, 596. Stamatelos 1868, 1671.

NOTE 44 Dörpfeld 1965, 255.

NOTE 45 Petropoulos 1994, 150,163, pl. 75b.

NOTE 46 Dörpfeld 1965, 322.

NOTE 47 Touloupa 1973-73, 590, pl. 404c.

NOTE 48 Dörpfeld 1965, 325.

NOTE 49 Dörpfeld 1965, 325.

NOTE 50 Souli-Tzouvara 1987, 176. Oeconomidou 1975, 47. NOTE 51 Dörpfeld 1965, 325.

NOTE 52 Dörpfeld 1965, 328.

note 53 Dörpfeld 1965, 328.

NOTE 54 In 1989, a Roman cist grave was found in the location Paliolakos near Spartochori village, containing glass and clay vessels.

NOTE 55 Andreou 1979, 269.

NOTE 56 Axioti 1980, 187-205.

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