

ANTIGONEA IN EPIRUS

By N. G. L. HAMMOND

The region in which Antigonea is to be sought is one of the most spectacular in Europe. Its modern capital, Argyrokastro, is built on the steep and bare limestone mountainside to the west of the river Drin, which runs northwards through a narrow alluvial plain, enclosed on either side by roughly parallel ranges of great height. At this latitude the mountains of the Kurvelesh on the west, attaining heights over 5,000 feet, and the mountains of Llunxherië on the east, surpassing 6,000 feet, are relatively far apart; but as one proceeds northwards, the mountains converge and pinch the valley of the Drin between their towering masses. Here the Drin runs deep in a gorge, cut by its own waters in a shaley flysch formation, which is rich in springs, thickly wooded and deeply fissured. The modern road, which stays on the west side of the river, descends quite steeply through the gorge of the Drin. Below Lekel one enters an open flattish area, some 500 feet above sea-level, in which the Drin and the Bencë, emerging from an impassable limestone gorge, join the great river, the ancient Aous. The central point of the open area is Tepelenë, built beside the river. Below Tepelenë the Aous valley is relatively open, and the going is easy on foot, but the modern road climbs westwards and crosses the limestone mountain-sides on its way to the Bay of Valona. Above Tepelenë, or rather above Dragot, the Aous comes through a magnificent gorge, cut aeons ago by a much greater river. The floor is fairly level and bare of trees, and the river is confined in its conglomerate bed. The steep faces of the limestone mountains tower above one on either side, until one emerges from the gorge—the Aoi Stena—at Kelcyrë, where the countryside is open, undulating and wooded.¹

The mountains and the rivers are as they were in antiquity, but the pattern of settlement is different. The only towns of the regions—Tepelenë and Argyrokastro—are west of the Drin, but in the Hellenistic period the corresponding sites at Lekel, Saraginishtë, Labovë and Vlaho Goranxhi lay east of the Drin. It follows from this that the system of communications in antiquity was different; for the rivers are often raging torrents, and it is impossible even today to bridge the larger rivers in level areas, where the bed shifts, for instance in the area where the Drin joins the Aous. It is clear, then, that in antiquity the main route ran east of the Drin, and then passed from Lekel on the Drin to a point above Dragot where the waters of the Aous in its conglomerate bed can more easily be bridged. From Dragot the main route in antiquity ran along the east bank of the Aous at first; for the chief market was at Apollonia east of the lower Aous and not at Oricum on the Bay of Valona.² On the other hand the route through the Aoi Stena was as it is today; for there is no alternative, since the river has stayed within its bed in the conglomerate rock.

The site of Antigonea has been discovered recently by Albanian archaeologists. During extensive excavations in the fortress of Yerma some round voting-discs of bronze with the inscription ANTIGON | NEQN were found, and an illustration of one is included on Plate III, 1 of a communication made by Frano Prendi and Dhimosten Budina at the Second International Congress of Southeast European Studies, which was held at Athens in May 1970.³

Yerma is the name of a ridge, west of the village of Saraginishtë, upon which are the walls of what I described in my book *Epirus* as 'the largest site in the Drin valley'.⁴ It is some 7 km east of the Drin river and stands high above the valley floor, the highest point of the acropolis being 2,520 ft. above sea-level. I published a view of the Drin valley from the acropolis in *Epirus*, Plate XV. The brief report by Prendi and Budina confirms my observations that cross-walls were built at frequent intervals between the outer and inner faces of the circuit-wall, and that the style at one point on the acropolis was 'a mixture of ashlar and polygonal'.⁵ These and other characteristics enabled me to put the first stage of the

¹ I described the Aoi Stena in *JRS* 66 (1966), 39 ff. and the whole region in *Epirus* (Oxford, 1967), 206 ff. The descriptions were based upon my travels in Albania before the war.

² For the Roman road-system see *Epirus* 694 ff., and Map 18 on p. 700.

³ Frano Prendi and Dhimosten Budina, 'La civilisation illyrienne de la vallée du Drinos',

Communications de la délégation de la R.P. d'Albanie, II^e Congrès international des Études du Sud-est Européen (Tirana 1970). I am most grateful to Frano Prendi for sending me a copy. I was not present at the Conference.

⁴ *Epirus* 209 f. with Plan 18.

⁵ *Communication* 19–21 and *Epirus* 210.

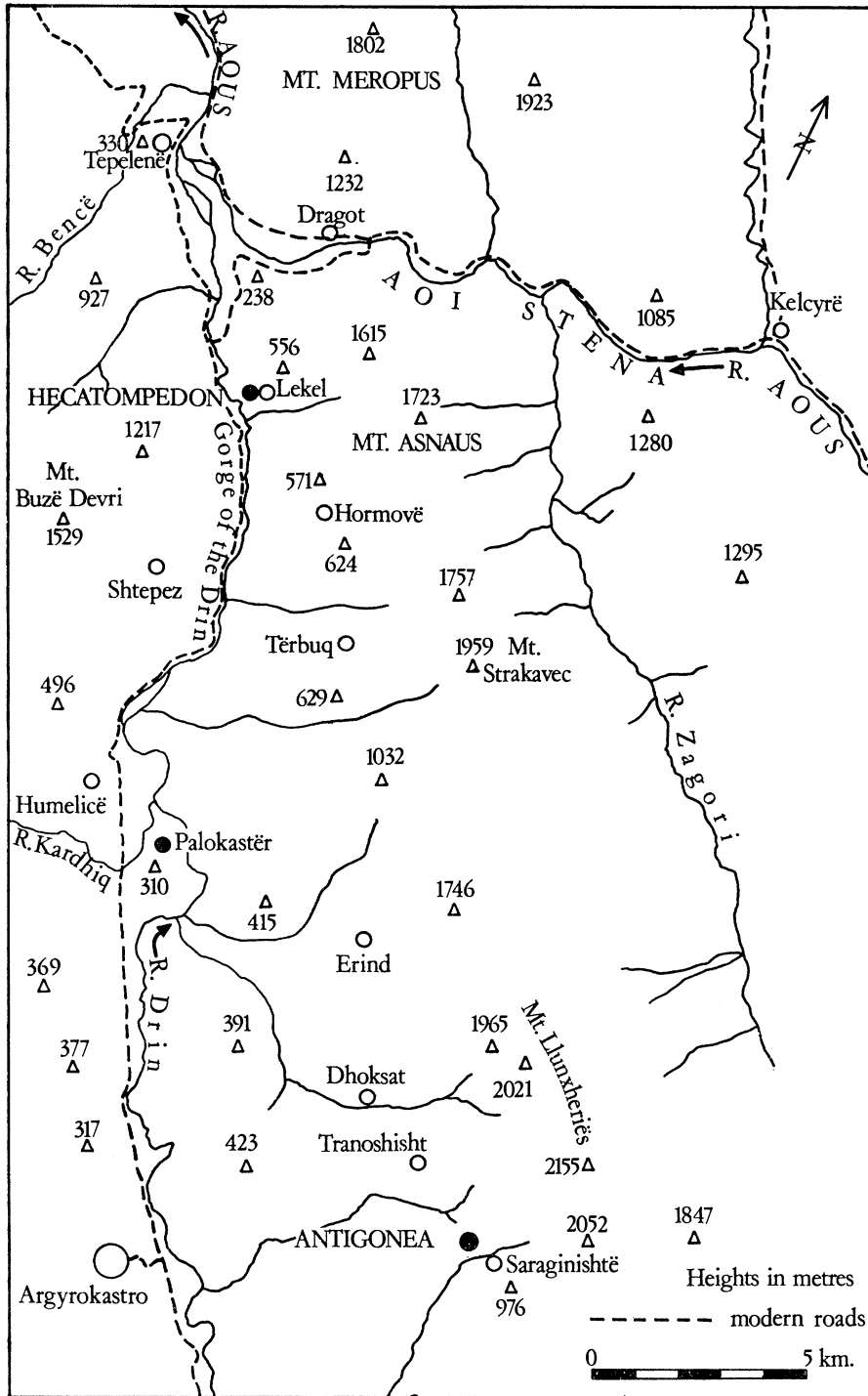


FIG. 12. MAP OF ANTIGONEA AND THE VALLEYS OF THE DRIN AND AOUS RIVERS

Drawn by Roger Goodburn from a sketch made by the author

fortifications at Saraginishtë into a group which I attributed to the first period of Pyrrhus' building activities c. 297–290 B.C. The excavations led Prendi and Budina to the same dating for the earliest stage at Saraginishtë. 'Les données stratigraphiques et typologiques font remonter ces murs au commencement du IIIe siècle avant notre temps, un temps celui-ci qui coïncide avec la période du règne de Pyrrhus, au nom duquel certains archéologues veulent rattacher aussi sa fondation,' with a footnote citing *Epirus* 578.⁶ In my surface survey of the site I distinguished three stages of fortification, each marking a further enlargement of the city, and I put the final size at a circuit of some 2,600 m., with the caveat that 'the complete circuit of walls is difficult to trace because the western slopes of Yerma have been deeply eroded by rainfall'. Prendi and Budina have found the circuit to be about 4,000 m.⁷ Thus, on my dating of the final stage of fortification, Antigonea ranked in size after Ambracia and Phoenice among the cities of Epirus in 230–167 B.C.⁸

In connection especially with the Second Macedonian War there has been much dispute in the past about the identification of 'the defile by Antigonea' (τὰ παρ' Ἀντιγονείῳ στενὰ in Plb. 2, 5, 6, and 'quae ad Antigoneam fauces sunt' in Livy 32, 5, 9). Kromayer, Tarn, De Sanctis and Holleaux, for instance, put the defile on the river Aous; some equated this defile with the 'Aoi Stena', where the battle was fought between Philip V and Flamininus, and others put 'the defile by Antigonea' farther downstream by Tepelenë. In his book *Philip V of Macedon*, Walbank gave an excellent summary of earlier views and appeared to place the defile at the confluence of the Aous and the Drin,⁹ but in his *Historical Commentary on Polybius* I, 156 he decided that the defile 'must be the short gorge on the Drin immediately south of its confluence' with the Aous. In an article in this *Journal* in 1966 (vol. LVI, 39 ff.) and in *Epirus* 278, I argued on the basis partly of personal knowledge of the area that 'the defile by Antigonea' is the long defile of the Drin, which begins at Lekel some 5 miles south of Tepelenë.¹⁰ I described this defile in *Epirus* 212 f., as one approaches it from the south. 'The lower Drin valley narrows where it is entered by the stream Kardhiq, two hours to the north of Argyrokastro, . . . by Palokastër . . . To the north of Palokastër the valley narrows and becomes thickly wooded with oak scrub and maquis. The river flows in a gorge for several kilometres, and the sides of the valley are very steep. Then at Lekel the defile opens, and the valley widens out before the confluence of the Drin and the Aous at Tepelenë.'

The identification of Antigonea with the site by Saraginishtë shows that 'the defile by Antigonea' is indeed the defile of the Drin. For, as the crow flies, Saraginishtë is some 27 km from the Aous valley near Tepelenë, whereas it is some 14 km from the southern end of the defile of the Drin. Any army which occupied Antigonea was able to threaten the main route from the north into central Epirus; for this route ran through the defile of the Drin. It was the route which Scerdilaïdas followed in 230 B.C. (Plb. 2, 5, 6 and 2, 6, 7), and which the Epirotes tried to close by sending troops to Antigonea (Plb. 2, 5, 6).¹¹

Until fairly recently Antigonea was placed at Tepelenë.¹² In 1966 I rejected the identification on the grounds that Tepelenë has nothing to do with the defile of the Drin, has no ancient remains and is an unsuitable site for the emplacement of a fortified Greek city.¹³ Instead, I proposed to identify as Antigonea the strongly fortified site at Lekel which sits immediately over the northern entry to the defile of the Drin. Nor was this because of its position alone, for the style of the walls at Lekel led me to date the fortification of the site to the period c. 297–290 B.C. In connection with the identification of Antigonea, I mentioned the site at Saraginishtë, which in its first stage has the same style of walls as the site of Lekel, but only to dismiss it in my mind as being so very much further away from the defile of the Drin than Lekel. My logic may have been sound, but the fact is that I was wrong. For Polybius named the defile not by the city closest to it but by the largest city in the region: in other words he related the defile to the city and not the city to the defile.

⁶ *Epirus* 669 and *Communications* 21.

⁷ *Epirus* 211 and *Communications* 20.

⁸ See the table in *Epirus* 659.

⁹ F. W. Walbank, *Philip V of Macedon* (Cambridge, 1940) 149 f. with the Plan and the note on p. 149.

¹⁰ See *JRS* LVI, 47.

¹¹ For this campaign see *Epirus* 279 and 117 f.

¹² See the summary in F. W. Walbank, *Philip V* 149, n. 1, and his own identification of Antigonea with Tepelenë in his *Commentary on Polybius* I, 156; he mentions my views in his *Commentary* II (1967), 555 and 630, but does not comment on them.

¹³ *Epirus* 220 f. and *JRS* LVI, 47.

Thus the site at Saraginishtë is Antigonea and not, as I supposed by elimination among the five named cities of Chaonia, Hecatompodon¹⁴—a name which may now be given to the site at Lekel.¹⁵ If my dating of the fortifications is correct, Pyrrhus established two strongpoints, one at each end of the defile of the Drin, and it was the strongpoint in the centre of the Drin valley which grew into the greater city and, like its modern counterpart, Argyrokastro, gave its name to the canton and to the defile, τὰ πᾶρ' Ἀντιγονείαν στενά.

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¹⁴ *Epirus* 699 f.

¹⁵ It was suggested in 1912 by Oberhummer in P-W, *RE* VII, col. 2789, that in his list of five inland cities Ptolemy the Geographer wrote Hecatompodon, meaning Dodona; for there was at Dodona a famous temple called the Hecatompodon, as indeed there was at Athens. This suggestion has been accepted by many scholars and L-S-J⁹ even cites the passage in Ptolemy as the authority for there being a Hecatompodon temple at Dodona. A moment's reflection shows how absurd the suggestion is. How many authors, whether distinguished as geographers or not, have put in a list of leading cities Hecatompodon,

meaning Athens, or even Parthenon, meaning Athens, or St. Paul's, meaning London, or St. Giles, meaning Edinburgh? Or is the idea that Ptolemy knew of the Hecatompodon but not of the city in which it stood, i.e. Dodona, one of the famous centres of Greek tradition? In fact, of course, Dodona even in its prime was not a great city but a small one, and in the second century of the Roman Empire, if we recall the description by Strabo, VII C 327 fin., it was probably desolate. Let us accept what Ptolemy said as what Ptolemy meant, that Hecatompodon was one of the leading cities in Epirus.