

INTRODUCTION

Amongst the territories that fall within the “Dritte Griechenland”, to use H.J. Gehrke’s apt expression, Epirus presents a series of extremely unusual characteristics, including a late process of urbanisation and a diverse range of peoples (*ethne*), as testified by Ancient sources, which, ultimately, would be encompassed by the three main ethnic groups: Chaonians, Thesprotians and Molossians. It is also strange how a concept that was initially simply geographic and not ethnic (*Epeiros*, the “mainland”) came to lend its name to a State, or how its inhabitants, who were sometimes considered to be Greek, were very often included under the heading of barbarians. It is also peculiar how these territories, which were remote and somewhat marginal for many Greeks, hosted the location of the Sanctuary of Dodona, which was mentioned in Homer’s Poems and, over time, came to be considered the oldest sanctuary in Greece. As if this were not enough, Dodona has provided an enormous collection of oracular inscriptions quite unlike that of any other Greek sanctuary.

In effect, this is a territory of contrasts and one that is not easy to categorise when we think of the Greek world. However, the study of this region not only opens up numerous possibilities regarding the question of the development of Epirus in Antiquity, but also the possibility of applying this knowledge to Ancient Greece as a whole.

In recent years there has been growing interest amongst researchers in studying and learning about Ancient Epirus. Some of the aspects that have attracted the priority attention of scholars include the following: new excavations, both urgent and systematic; the publication of new epigraphic texts, including the extraordinary collection of tablets from Dodona, the sanctuary mentioned above; new methodological perspectives regarding the political organisation of those Greek States, such as the Epirote State, that do not fit the city-state model; and new ideas

Politics, Territory And Identity In Ancient Epirus

regarding the construction of ethnic identities.

Many of these issues are addressed in the present volume of the *Diabaseis* Collection from different methodological perspectives. In line with other volumes from this collection, which pays special attention to this part of the Greek world, we intend to offer the reader various approaches and a series of answers regarding some of the problems that current research raises about Ancient Epirus.

In this book we do not seek to tackle all of the issues that emerge when studying Ancient Epirus. Rather we shall focus in some depth on a series of case studies regarding specific themes, such as the political development of Epirus during different historical periods and the connection with its control over its territory and the construction of identities; the role of the Sanctuary of Dodona and its relations with the outside world or realms of religion and politics; the issue of the peculiar characteristics of the Greek language spoken in Epirus; and the discovery of Epirus by the earliest travellers. We believe all sources and methodologies are equally valid when it comes to reconstructing the historical past of a territory such as Epirus, about which we do not always have as much information as we would like. In this book the reader will come across works of a historical, archaeological and philological nature, all of which will provide a special and specific perspective, an especially enriching one in our opinion.

This book is also the result of the Research Project “Ethnogenesis, Settlement, Territory and Federalism in Ancient Epirus” (HAR2014-53885) supported by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities. Thanks to this project and previous research, our team, made up of professors from Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, has spent a number of years pursuing different historical studies on different territories throughout Ancient Greece, and publishing the results in different media. This Research Project, which follows on from other projects we have carried out, has enabled us to study a territory that is practically new to Spanish historiography, based on an analysis of literary sources as well as an analysis of historical topography, a tool of considerable interest given that it brings together all of the information available and enables us to build up an overall historical picture. We hope to continue this line of research in the near future. Through this work and other initiatives we also seek to persuade the Spanish authorities to set up the long-desired Spanish School of Hellenic Studies, an institution that would be based in Athens and would constitute an essential means of undertaking archaeological initiatives (prospection and excavation) in Greece.

On this occasion, the prestigious *Diabaseis* Series has been kind enough

Introduction

to present the results of our research, in which respect I would like to express my gratitude to Claudia Antonetti, the Editor of the Collection, for having offered us this opportunity. My gratitude also goes to all of the authors and, in particular, to those colleagues who have not formed part of this team, but who have wished to support our initiative with works of extraordinary quality that present new details of considerable importance.

Finally, I would like to thank the doctoral research students at the Ancient History Department of Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Ms. Cristina García García and Mr. Aitor Luz Villafranca, for their considerable work in tasks relating to the publication of this volume and the compilation of its indices.

Madrid, November 2018

Adolfo J. Domínguez