

This is the first page only. On how to acquire the full article please click this link.

Archaeology in the landscape of Roman Epirus: preliminary report on the Diaporit excavations, 2002-3

W. Bowden and L. Përzhita

with information provided by S. Moorhead and P. Reynolds

Introduction (W.B.)

The Roman province of Epirus straddled what is now the border between Greece and Albania. In both countries the Roman age has traditionally been considered a period of dominance by a foreign power, one contrasted negatively with both preceding and later periods. As a result, Roman archaeology has been of relatively minor importance, and Roman remains have been encountered mainly as a by-product of other research. Further, Roman remains have tended to be noted in the urban centres; excavation outside the urban centres has been limited, and what there has been has largely consisted of exploration of visible standing monuments or those encountered during salvage excavation.¹

In Albania, knowledge of the Roman landscape outside the towns is minimal. Only the large site close to Elbasan (Scampis) on the Via Egnatia and suggested to be the road station *Ad Quintum* has been the subject of any concentrated excavation, although excavation of the fortified Hellenistic farmstead of Malathrea has also produced evidence of Roman phases.² The major surveys carried out by Albanian archaeologists from the late 1960s onwards, aimed at creating an "archaeological map" of the country, concentrated mainly on recording the visible monuments in the landscape and collating information gained from excavations and chance finds. Apart from isolated findspots of inscriptions and graves, few Roman sites were recorded during these exercises, in which attention was focused on sites of other periods.³

In Greece, the archaeology of the Roman landscape has been written almost entirely through a large number of field surveys. In 1993 S. E. Alcock could note 21 survey projects of varying focus and intensity, and the last decade has added many more.⁴ By contrast, excavation targeted on Roman Greece has been largely absent. The rise of field survey as the archaeological tool for the study of Roman Greece results in part from the diminishing funds available for archaeological research. Furthermore, while political and financial constraints have made archaeologists in Greece (particularly British) more reliant on field survey, the broad diachronic approach of field survey has also been more compatible with the theoretical positions adopted by many of its practitioners than have site- and period-specific excavations. Many survey projects (e.g., the Boeotia survey) have methodologies that are rooted in processualist theory, based in part on the apparent similarity between Braudelian medium- and long-term histories and the long-term "culture processes" that were sought as an alternative to event-based historical narratives. Traditional excavation was linked to the search for *événements* and short-term historical ephemera, leaving survey as a more suitable tool with which to recover the "longer-term semi-autonomous agricultural and demographic cycles or Braudelian *conjunctures*".⁵ However, recent revisionist critiques have questioned both the extent to which field survey can be used to reconstruct long-term landscape history and the validity of ever-more-complex sampling strategies and techniques of quantification.⁶ While field survey has

1 On Roman archaeology in Greece, see Alcock 1993, introduction. On Albania, see Bowden 2003.

2 For *Ad Quintum* (which could be a villa rather than a road-station) see Ceka 1976. For Malathrea, see Çondi 1984.

3 Budina 1971 and 1975.

4 Alcock 1993, 34 ff.

5 Bintliff 1991, 130.

6 For example, Fentress 2000; Terrenato 2004.