

# HOMERIC TOWNS IN EAST LOKRIS

## PROBLEMS OF IDENTIFICATION

UNTIL QUITE RECENTLY, theories about the identification of the cities of East Lokris mentioned by Homer relied entirely on the notices of ancient authors and on surface finds.<sup>1</sup> No major excavations had been conducted, and few scholars had engaged themselves with the historical problems of this part of Greece. Indeed, the first and only attempts to explore East Lokris were made for the most part by members of the American School of Classical Studies: Hetty Goldman, who excavated at Halai,<sup>2</sup> Carl Blegen, who searched for Opous and made some trial trenches at the site of Kyparissi,<sup>3</sup> and William Oldfather, who studied the topography and the inscriptions of East Lokris.<sup>4</sup> In addition, scanty references are to be found in various works.<sup>5</sup> The only conclusion to be drawn, however, is that in archaeological terms, the area is still very little known.

Recent excavations in this region, for the most part rescue operations carried out since 1977 by the Ephorate of Lamia, have provided much new material from all periods of Greek history.<sup>6</sup> This material is both interesting and informative, being unknown and in some ways unexpected and showing how much we have to learn from areas still unexplored, such as East Lokris. The problems raised by the new finds are, to be sure, sometimes more numerous than the questions answered.

In the *Iliad* (2.531–533), Homer briefly describes the land possessed by the Lokrians as being the part of Central Greece that lies opposite Euboia. From this passage, the names of eight Lokrian cities are known: Kynos, Opous, Kalliaros, Bessa, Skarphe, Augeiai, Tarphe, and Thronion, all in East Lokris. Homer says nothing about the West Lokrians, a problem as yet unresolved. Strabo defines East Lokris, Opountian and Epiknemidian, as the area extending from Halai (southeast) to Thermopylai (northwest).<sup>7</sup>

The archaeological material comes for the most part from Opountian Lokris, the area in and around the plain of Atalante. I shall, therefore, concentrate chiefly on this region (Fig. 1).

<sup>1</sup>This article was presented in the form of a lecture at the American School of Classical Studies on March 14, 1989. I thank Professor W. D. E. Coulson, Director of the School, for inviting me to give the lecture, and I thank both Professor and Mrs. Coulson for their hospitality.

<sup>2</sup>Goldman 1940; Goldman and Jones 1942.

<sup>3</sup>Blegen 1926.

<sup>4</sup>Oldfather 1916a, 1916b; *RE* XIII, i, 1926, col. 1135, *s.v.* Lokris (W. Oldfather).

<sup>5</sup>For example: Klaffenbach 1925–1926; Huxley 1967; Pritchett 1985, p. 166; Philippson 1951, pp. 339–348.

<sup>6</sup>See *ΑρχΔελτ* 1977 and subsequently.

<sup>7</sup>Strabo 9.4.2.

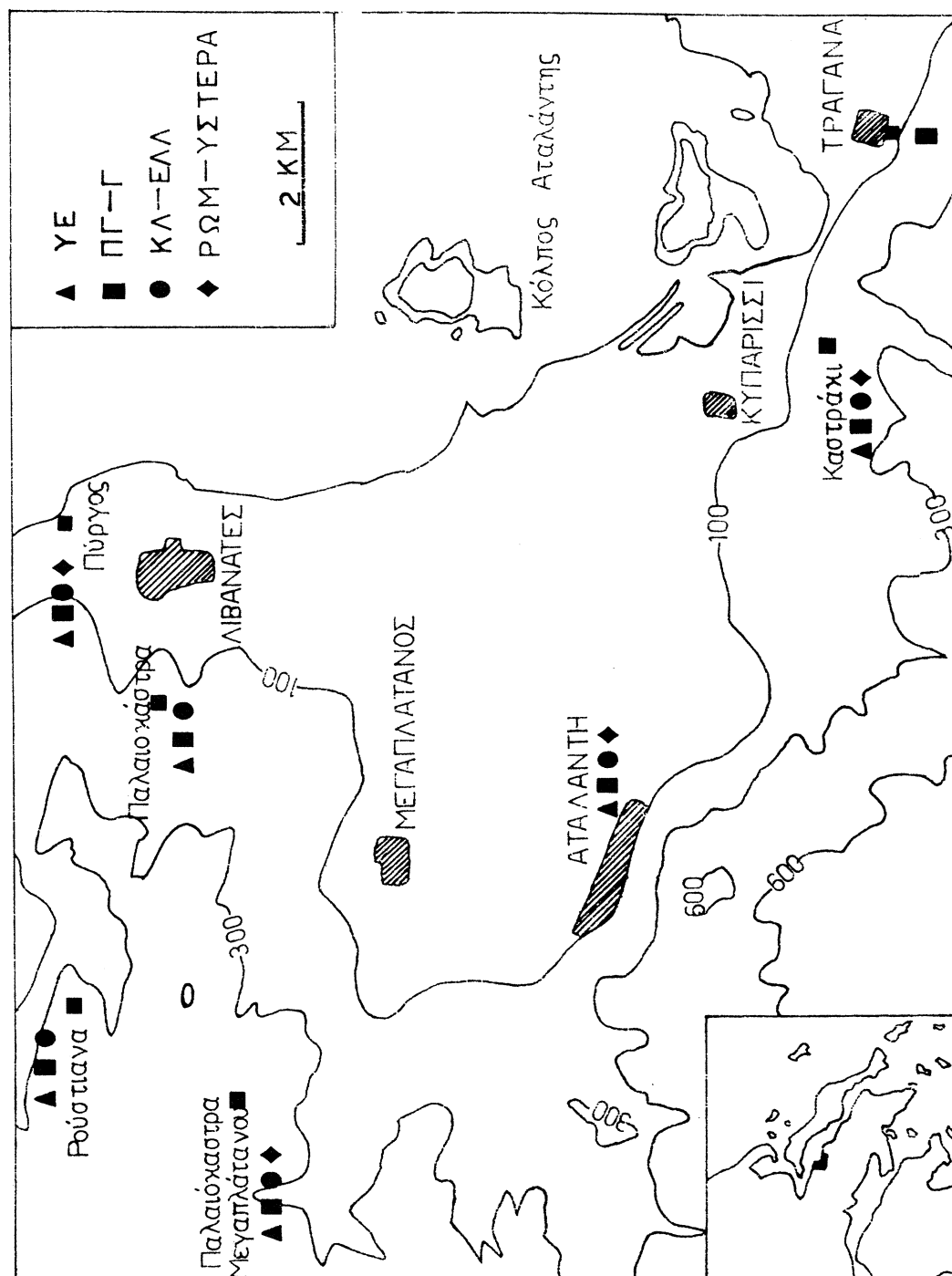


Fig. 1. Map of Opountian Lokris

The main city of the area was Opous, the capital of Opountian Lokris, and at times of all East Lokris.<sup>8</sup> The name is derived from an eponymous mythical king, the son of Zeus according to Pindar (*Ol.* 9.53) or of Lokros according to Plutarch (*Quaest. Gr.* 15). His mother was Cambyse according to Aristotle (fr. 561), or Cabye according to Plutarch (*Quaest. Gr.* 15), while the old Lokrian mythology gives her name as Protogeneia. Here was the seat of Aias, king of Opous, whose origin and place of birth was Naryx. This is the only ancient Lokrian city to have been surely identified, through an inscription found in the vicinity of Reggini, a village north of Kamena Voulia, by Papadakis at the beginning of this century.<sup>9</sup> Homer makes no mention of Naryx.

At the southeast end of the Atalante plain, near the modern village of Kyparissi, there is a chain of smooth hills. One hill at the eastern end, known as Kastraki or Kokinovrachos, is the most likely candidate for the city of Opous. Remains of a polygonal fortification wall are preserved on top of the hill. The site dominates the entire Atalante plain as well as an important road to the south. Blegen's explorations in the area demonstrated that the site was indeed an important city with a chronological span from at least the 5th century B.C. until Late Roman times.<sup>10</sup> In the foothills of Kastraki, Hope Simpson and Lazenby found a deposit containing sherds ranging from LH IIIB-C through Protogeometric and Geometric to the Archaic period.<sup>11</sup> Recent excavations have borne out Blegen's supposition that there was a large city in this place.<sup>12</sup>

A significant new building excavated in 1978 and 1979 on the slopes of Kastraki has been identified as a stoa (Fig. 2).<sup>13</sup> Dating to the second half of the 6th century B.C., the stoa clearly belonged to an important shrine and was used to house minor offerings. It is of the Doric order and had poros columns and entablature; roof tiles, simas, and acroteria were of terracotta.<sup>14</sup> So elaborate a building bespeaks a sanctuary of importance, no doubt belonging to a prominent town. The stoa was destroyed by an earthquake; the site is frequently afflicted by earthquakes, lying as it does near the well-known Atalante seismic fault.

The archaeological evidence indicates that there was a large and important town of the Lokrians in this place. The ancient writers, moreover, tell us that the most important Lokrian town was Opous. To support the identification of the area of Kastraki as Opous, however, the evidence of inscriptions is needed. Inscriptions do exist, but they were found not at Kastraki or in the Kyparissi area

<sup>8</sup> See especially *RE* XVIII, i, 1939, *s.v.* Opous and *RE* XIII, i, 1926, *s.v.* Lokris (W. Oldfather), where all references to the ancient literary sources are collected.

<sup>9</sup> Papadakis 1923, p. 143.

<sup>10</sup> Blegen 1926.

<sup>11</sup> Hope Simpson and Lazenby 1970, p. 47; Hope Simpson and Dickinson 1979, p. 262.

<sup>12</sup> For the new discoveries in the area of Kyparissi and Kastraki, cf. *ΑρχΔελτ*, *Χρονικά* 1977 and subsequent years. The excavations were conducted by the 14th Ephoreia of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities at Lamia, under the the direction of Fanouria Dakoronia, Ephor of Antiquities.

<sup>13</sup> Dakoronia 1986 and 1987a, p. 187.

<sup>14</sup> Dakoronia 1990, p. 175.



Fig. 2. Kyparissi: plan of Archaic stoa

but in Atalante.<sup>15</sup> Some mention Opous or Opountian, and scholarly opinion has been divided over their interpretation. Klaffenbach, for example, identifies the site of Atalante as Opous on the basis of the inscriptions.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, Oldfather, who studied the topography of Lokris, insists that Opous must have been at Kastraki because the prominence of its position conforms better with the picture of a fortified place according to the Classical tradition than does the site of Atalante, which has no acropolis and was built on a plain.<sup>17</sup> To explain why the inscriptions were found at Atalante, Oldfather suggests that the inhabitants of Opous moved to Atalante after the earthquake of A.D. 107/6; they transferred the inscriptions, using those that had rolled down from Kastraki-Opous as building material. Indeed, there is no outcropping of limestone or marble in the Atalante area. Limestone is abundant in the area of Kastraki and no doubt was brought to Atalante from there; marble would have been transported from farther afield. It is, therefore, quite possible that following the frequent destructions by earthquake, settlers from Kastraki brought building material, which included a number of inscriptions.

As further support for his rejection of the identification of Atalante with Opous, Oldfather notes that the distance between Opous and Kynos given by Strabo does not agree with the measured distance between Atalante and Kynos. Blegen, who explored the area around Kyparissi and Kastraki, leaves the question open, but he gives the impression that he is disposed somewhat toward the Opous-Kastraki solution.

Until recently, apart from the deposit mentioned above, no material of the Early Iron Age had been found in the area around Kyparissi-Kastraki. A cemetery of this period found and excavated at Tragana<sup>18</sup> can be ruled out as belonging to the Kastraki site because of its distance. Furthermore, in the vicinity of Tragana we have found surface evidence of an establishment to which logically the cemetery should belong. It should be noted that the excavations have not produced any Bronze Age material.

In the case of Atalante, the excavations of the past twelve years in the area of the modern town have produced much new material ranging in date from the Early Iron Age to as late as early Byzantine times.<sup>19</sup> Two pieces of evidence are important for its identification as a Homeric town: a cemetery of the Early Iron Age and an extended fortification wall. The cemetery was found in two building lots at the southern part of Atalante. Forty-five graves were excavated, while some others had been disturbed by a bulldozer.<sup>20</sup> Most of the graves were of the cist type, with a few pithos burials and two sarcophagi.<sup>21</sup> The two sarcophagi were a surprising

<sup>15</sup>IG IX, no. 1, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272-275, 276, 278.

<sup>16</sup>Klaffenbach 1936, p. 706, no. 1.

<sup>17</sup>RE XVIII, i, 1939, col. 813, s.v. Opous (W. Oldfather).

<sup>18</sup>Onasoglou 1989, pp. 1-57.

<sup>19</sup>For recent excavations in Atalante, see ΑρχΔελτ, Χρονικά 1977 and subsequent years.

<sup>20</sup>Karagiorgos lot, ΑρχΔελτ 41, 1986 [1990]; and Gouras lot, ΑρχΔελτ 42, 1987 [in press].

<sup>21</sup>These two sarcophagi were found in 1986 in a lot owned by Mr. Karagiorgos, located in Atalante in the neighborhood known as "Bothovatsa"; see note 20 above.

discovery, since this form of burial is very rare in the Iron Age throughout Greece; in addition, one sarcophagus is of a unique type, to the best of my knowledge. It is a sarcophagus of egg or pithos shape, perhaps an expensive imitation of a pithos burial. Both sarcophagi were richly furnished by comparison with the other graves, in which were deposited some vases and metal objects. One sarcophagus held a man, the other a woman, both between fifty and fifty-four years in age. With the skeleton of the man were his sword, shield, bronze rings, a pin, and some vases. The woman was likewise richly buried, with jewelry and vases.

Was this the chieftain of a clan and his wife? Is this evidence of social stratification? A similar case is provided by the burial of a child who lay in a cist grave accompanied by many gifts. He or she wore a diadem.<sup>22</sup> Was this a young prince or member of a royal house?

The second piece of evidence for the identification of Atalante is provided by a recently discovered extended fortification wall.<sup>23</sup> Blegen had excavated part of a city wall in the area of Atalante but published no additional information or plan.<sup>24</sup> Of this fortification wall, 350 meters was found in 1985 at the northeastern part of Atalante at a site called Makedonika, among Atalante's extensive olive groves. Datable to the end of the 4th and beginning of the 3rd centuries B.C., the wall is constructed of huge poros blocks laid in two parallel rows, connected at intervals by cross walls. Square towers were set at intervals (Fig. 3). The wall evidently continues beyond the 350 meters already revealed: small stretches of the fortification have been found in the southern neighborhood of Atalante<sup>25</sup> and on the east slope of the hill that rises immediately to the west above the modern city.<sup>26</sup> In the area within these stretches of wall (Fig. 4), excavations have brought to light remains of ancient buildings dating from Classical to early Byzantine times. Clearly there stood here a great city, one that lasted over many centuries. It dominated the only road to Phokis, and, despite Oldfather's opinion, it indeed had an acropolis of sorts, on the hill just west of Atalante, which excavations have shown was part of the ancient city.

These archaeological discoveries, taken together with the finding of the inscriptions mentioning Opous-Opountians, support the location of Opous at Atalante. If Opous was located here, however, what was the large and long-lived city at Kastraki? And if, to the contrary, Atalante was not Opous, which other Homeric town might it have been? Could it have been Kalliaros? According to Strabo, Kalliaros (named for one of the sons of Opous) was an easily cultivated plain, "*Ευήροτον πεδῖον*".<sup>27</sup> The only plain in this part of Greece deserving of this description is the plain of Atalante, and I agree with the many scholars who place Kalliaros in this area. There is, however, an argument against identifying Atalante with Kalliaros. Atalante

<sup>22</sup> The grave was found in 1987 in a lot belonging to Mr. Gouras, in the same area as the sarcophagi and not far from the Karagiorgos lot; see note 20 above, p. 119.

<sup>23</sup> *ΑρχΔελτ* 41, 1986 [1990]; *ΑρχΔελτ* 42, 1987 [in press].

<sup>24</sup> Blegen 1926.

<sup>25</sup> *ΑρχΔελτ* 43, 1988 [in press].

<sup>26</sup> *ΑρχΔελτ* 36, 1981 [1988], p. 238, Chimentos building lot.

<sup>27</sup> Strabo 9.4.5.

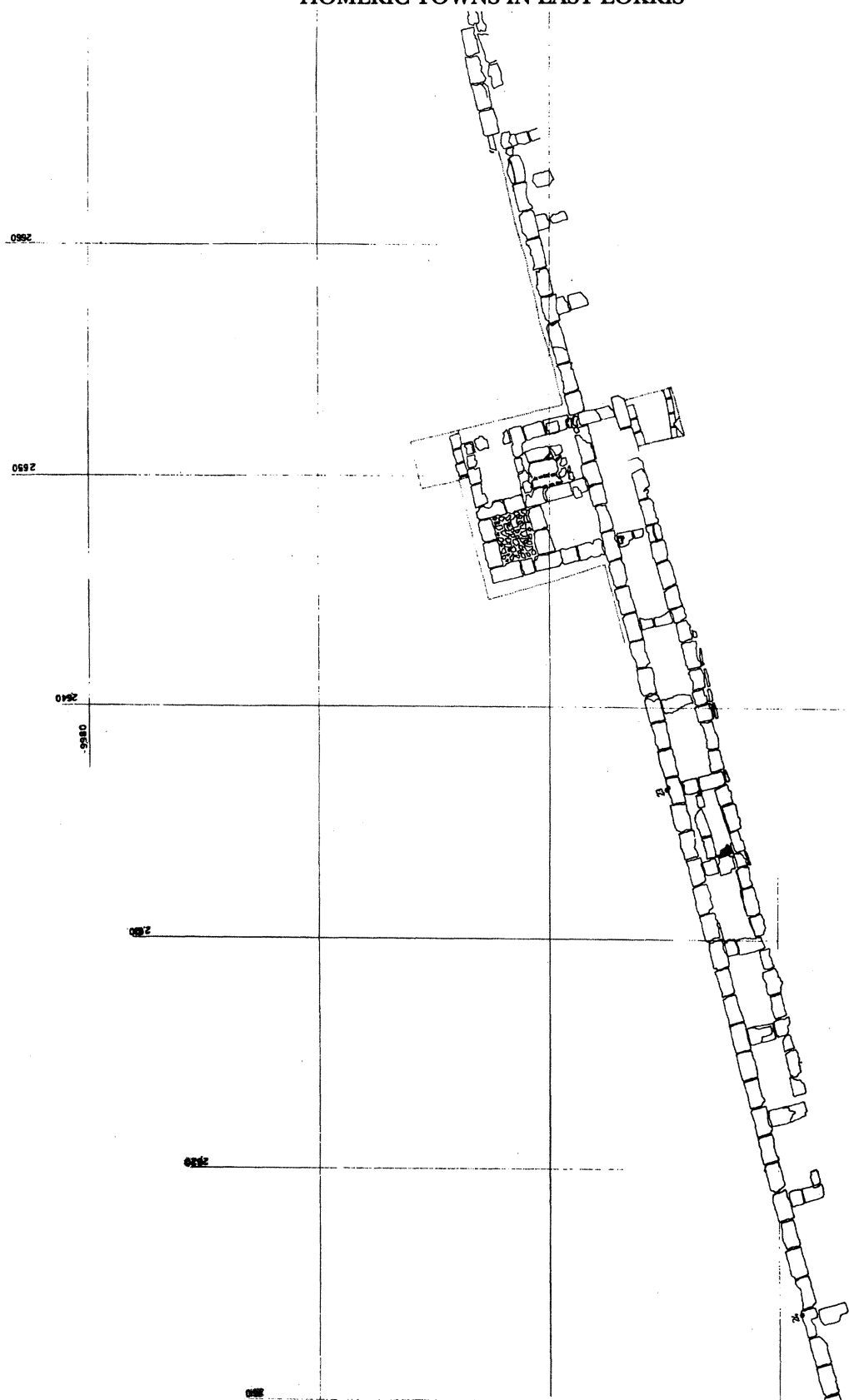


FIG. 3. Atalante: detail of fortification wall

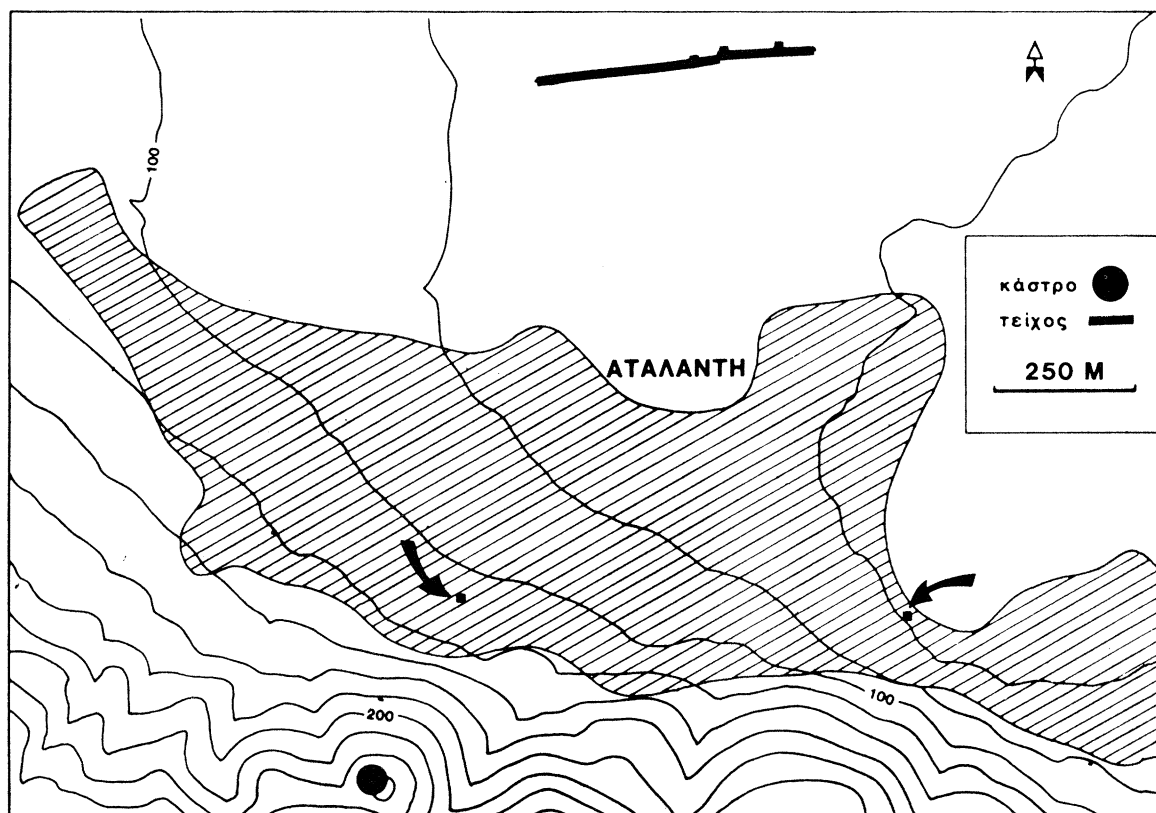


FIG. 4. Map of Atalante showing areas where fortifications were found

continued into early Byzantine times, as noted above, while Strabo states quite clearly that in his time, the 1st century B.C., Kalliaros was no longer in existence.

During the past few years we found and have partly excavated a small acropolis, previously unknown (Figs. 1, 5). It stands on a hill in the vicinity of the modern village of Megaplatanos and is surrounded by a fortification wall.<sup>28</sup> The site is at the northwest border of the Atalante plain and is known as Palaioikastra. The area is characterized by small, smooth hills with fertile soil. In addition to stretches of the fortification wall, along the outer side we excavated groups of graves belonging to the cemetery of the town. The area within the walls is not extensive, and clearly the settlement was small.

About one and a half kilometers south of this settlement we excavated six chamber tombs of Late Helladic III date.<sup>29</sup> The skeletons lay in contracted position on the floor of the chamber. These are classic chamber tombs with dromoi and entrances closed either by a stone slab or by a packing of smaller stones (Fig. 6). Vases, buttons, beads, and seals made up the bulk of burial gifts accompanying the dead. There was only one metal find: a ring with spiral ends.

<sup>28</sup> Dakoronia 1985, p. 140; Dakoronia 1987a, p. 190.

<sup>29</sup> Megaplatanos-Sventza, *ΑρχΔελτ* 40, 1985 [1991].



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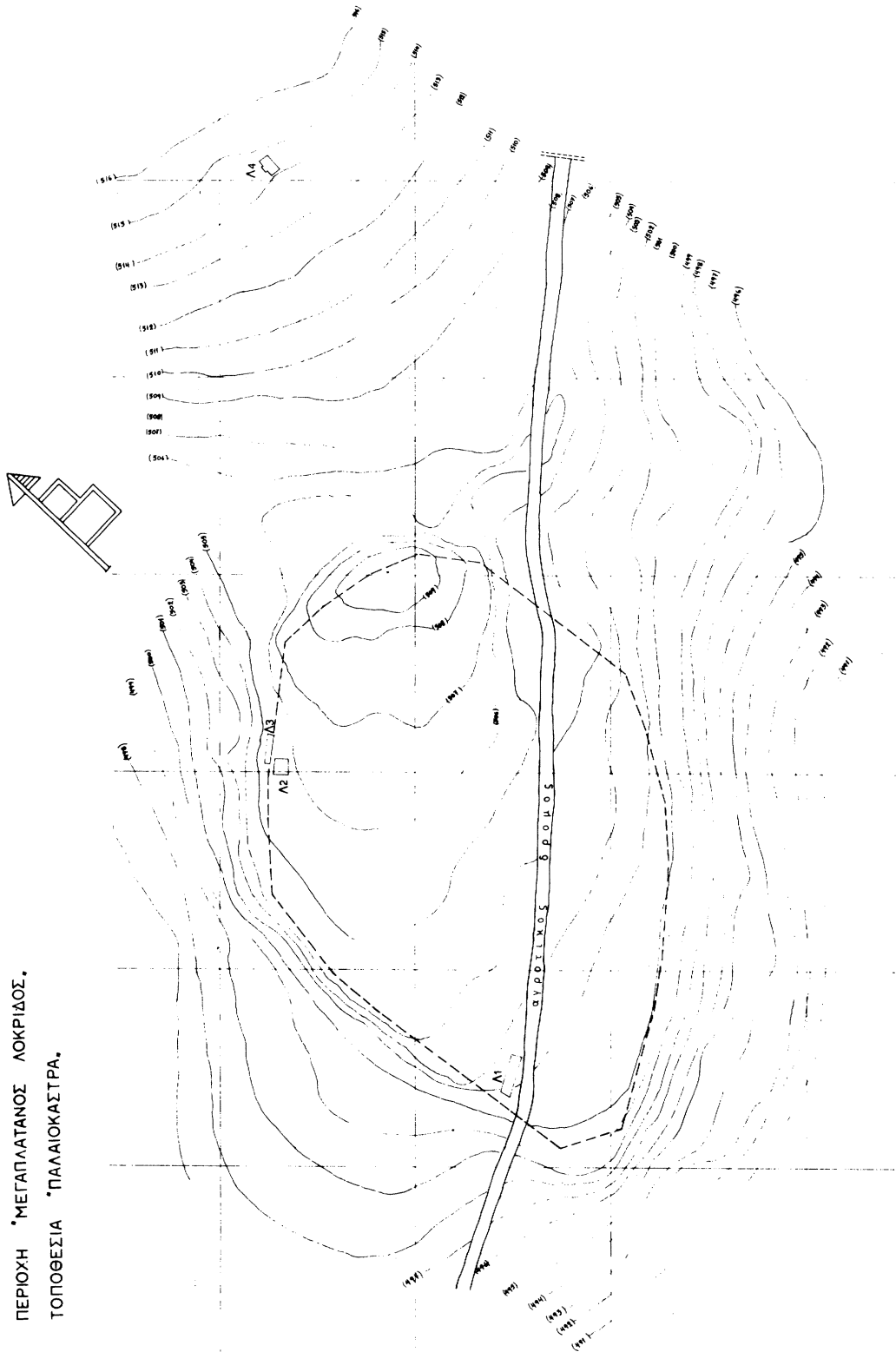


FIG. 5. Megaplatanos: acropolis at Palaiokestra

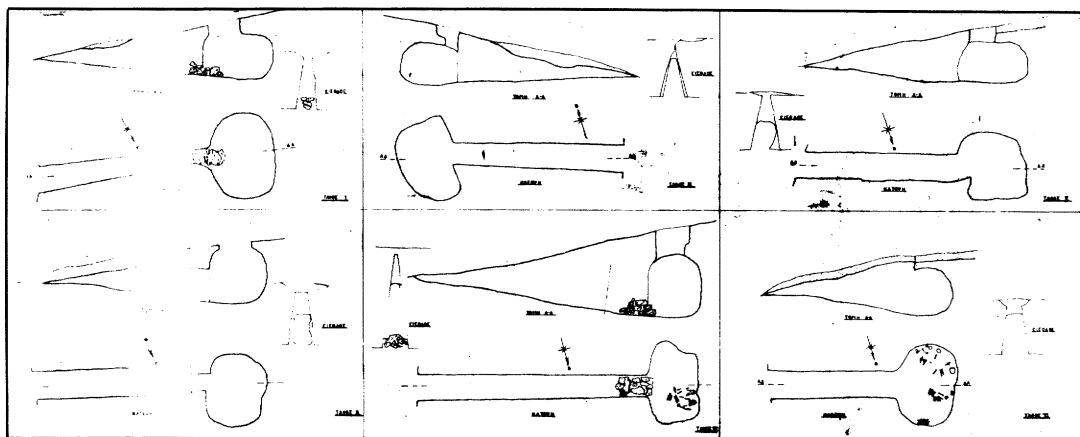


FIG. 6. Plans of Mycenaean chamber tombs south of Palaioikastra

Around the outer side of the fortification wall, we excavated many graves belonging to the cemetery of the ancient town. Most were huge pithoi that were used for the burial of adults. In Opountian Lokris, pithos burial was generally preferred during Classical and early Hellenistic times. Some larnakes and burials covered by roof tiles were also found.<sup>30</sup> The grave furnishings consisted for the most part of vases, but there were terracottas, coins, and some metal offerings as well. They range in date from the 5th to the late 4th century B.C. The sherds collected during excavation on the acropolis itself included some of Protogeometric style.

Can this site be identified as Kalliaros? Among the finds from Palaioikastra is a small fragment of an inscription. It comes from the lower right-hand corner, and the last word ended in *IAPΩN*. A reading of the words as *KΑΛΛΙΑΠΩN* presents a difficulty in that the plural of the ethnic name should be *KΑΛΛΙΑΠΕΩN*. Thus even if the reading *KΑΛΛΙΑΠΩN* is accepted, the inscription is still unsatisfactory because it gives us neither the name of the town nor the ethnic form. Stephanos of Byzantion, however, gives also the name *KΑΛΛΙΑΠΑ* for the place,<sup>31</sup> a name that might refer to smaller settlements around this fertile plain.

Even if the above suppositions can be accepted, it is still difficult to identify the place with Kalliaros. Strabo states clearly that Kalliaros no longer existed in his time, but there are a few sherds from Palaioikastra that are datable to the Late Roman period.

The next important town of Lokris noted by Homer is Kynos.<sup>32</sup> This was the main port of Opountian Lokris. It was named after the eponymous hero, son of Opous or, according to another tradition, son of Lokros. The town was settled either by Pyrrha and Deukalion or by Lokros. All modern writers agree that Homeric Kynos is the little hill known as Pyrgos or Palaiopyrgos, on the coast northeast of

<sup>30</sup> Dakoronia 1986.

<sup>31</sup> *RE* X, ii, 1919, col. 1613, s.v. Kalliaros (W. Oldfather).

<sup>32</sup> *RE* XII, i, 1924, col. 29, s.v. Kynos (W. Oldfather); Philippon 1951, p. 360.

the modern village Livanates.<sup>33</sup> At the top of the hill a Hellenistic fortification wall is visible.

It has been pointed out that places connected with the myth of Deukalion appear to have been inhabited as early as Middle Helladic times. At Pyrgos, recent rescue excavations on the southeast slope have revealed two Middle Helladic cist graves beneath the remains of a Mycenaean building.<sup>34</sup> In one, the skeleton was lying on its left side in a contracted position with the head to the northwest. This burial was poorly furnished with only two shells, and the body was covered by a thin layer of sand. The second grave was used twice. The bones of the first burial were set aside. In the subsequent burial, the body was also placed in a contracted position on its left side with the head to the west. The earlier burial in this grave received a gray Minyan amphoriskos with a potter's mark on the belly; it was found amongst the bones. The later burial was accompanied only by a spindle.

On the northwestern part of the hill, the Ephorate of Lamia is conducting a systematic excavation.<sup>35</sup> To date, beneath late Byzantine and Roman buildings, we have found part of a large complex of LH III date consisting of storerooms with a large pithos and two kilns. Clearly this is the manufacturing area of a house. It is noteworthy that the storerooms were damaged twice, both destructions occurring during LH IIIC times. During the first phase of the storerooms, clay bins were used for storage purposes. An earthquake ended this phase; immediately afterwards, the storerooms were rebuilt, and large pithoi were then used for the storage of crops. These storerooms were destroyed by fire, and the spot was no longer used for storage purposes. Habitation of the site continued, however; the debris was leveled and built over. This rebuilding happened at the transition of LH IIIC to Submycenaean times. An interesting feature of this settlement, and one that to my mind revives MH burial custom, is the interment of children beneath the floors of the houses. The graves were very small cists; clearly they were for babies or very young children. They were generally poorly furnished, containing a pair of shells or beads made of fish bones. One somewhat richer grave yielded a small jug. The excavation, which is continuing, has given us much interesting material, in particular pottery from all periods.

The surface of the hill is not more than seventeen acres. Excavation around the hillsides did not demonstrate habitation through all the periods represented on the hill itself. Roman graves were commonly located some distance from the area of the hill.

Thus the archaeological picture does not agree with the descriptions from the ancient authors of Kynos as a big, important town with a well-developed terracotta industry.<sup>36</sup> The site of Pyrgos resembles more a harbor settlement than a big city.

Some 2.5 kilometers west-southwest of Livanates is a fairly extensive acropolis where remains of a fortification wall are visible. The site is prominent and dominates the area as far as the sea. Here, too, the site is known as Palaioikastra. It is known

<sup>33</sup> See note 32 above, p. 124; Pritchett 1985; Philippson 1951, p. 348.

<sup>34</sup> Dakoronia 1987a, p. 186; Dakoronia 1987b.

<sup>35</sup> Kynos, *ΑρχΔελτ* 40, 1985 [199]); *ΑρχΔελτ* 41, 1986 [1990].

<sup>36</sup> See note 32 above, p. 124.

to modern writers, and some have located Kalliaros here.<sup>37</sup> Excavations of recent years around this acropolis have revealed rich cemeteries. Among the graves found are two Mycenaean chamber tombs. One was in use into Roman times;<sup>38</sup> the burial gifts consisted of vases for the most part, as well as beads. The other chamber tomb had been robbed. In addition to these two tombs, many rich graves of the Classical period were found, most pithos burials, and a rich deposit containing many vases, figurines, and bronzes, perhaps from the cleaning of a nearby shrine.<sup>39</sup>

The presence of a large and important town here is clear from the extensive acropolis and from the richness of the cemeteries around it. Pyrgos is not far away from this site, and it may well be that the town of Kynos is to be located at Palaiokastrá-Livanates, with the site of Pyrgos as the Kynos harbor settlement.

After Kynos, Homer speaks of Bessa. Strabo (9.4.5) writes that Bessa received its name because it was in a wooded place; he says that in his time the town no longer existed.

West-northwest of Livanates, we found another acropolis. It is a mountainous and wooded site, surrounded by a fortification wall which was previously unknown (Fig. 1). The site today is called Roustiana.<sup>40</sup> This is high, steep terrain, on the surface of which abundant Mycenaean pottery was found. At the foot of the acropolis we excavated a cemetery consisting solely of pithos burials of Classical times. None of the finds or sherds from this area are datable later than the end of the 4th century B.C. Both the morphology of the site and the archaeological evidence suggest that this could have been the location of Bessa.

The rest of the Homeric towns are best omitted from the present discussion. To date there is no new evidence and therefore no reason to add speculation to the present confusion over their identification. Surface material alone, sometimes not really indicative, does not provide the most accurate evidence for such identifications and should be used with caution. It should likewise be noted that in East Lokris there are many sites providing evidence of habitation at the end of the Bronze Age and beginning of the Iron Age.

Thus recent research has led us to the following conclusions about the Homeric topography of Opountian Lokris:

1. It is certain that we have located three important settlements and two minor ones.

2. The evidence available for the identification of Opous is not conclusive.

3. Palaiokastrá-Livanates and Pyrgos should be the two parts of Homeric Kynos, the town and the harbor settlement. Even today such a system is not unknown, Livanates and Skála Livanaton and Atalante and Skála Atalante being good examples.

The major conclusion reached here is that the interest of scholars should be directed not only to the large and famous centers of antiquity but also to the outlying

<sup>37</sup>Lolling 1889, p. 132, 1.

<sup>38</sup>Livanates-Kokinonizes, *ΑρχΔελτ* 35, 1980 [1986].

<sup>39</sup>Gremina, *ΑρχΔελτ* 36, 1981, B' 1 [1989], p. 221; Triantaphyllia, *ΑρχΔελτ* 37, 1982 [1989], p. 181.

<sup>40</sup>Roustiana, *ΑρχΔελτ* 35, 1980 [1986].

regions and to those areas still unexplored, which have preserved much information and interesting material.

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