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The Locrians and the Sea*

As is well known, the Locrians occupied two different territories in central Greece, although for both the relationship with the sea was intense. Eastern Locris occupied a stretch of about 80 km. as the crow flies on the Gulf of Northern Euboea while Western Locris occupied a similar distance along the north coast of the Gulf of Corinth. In this paper I shall analyse the information we have about the relationship of these two territories with the sea. We shall begin our analysis with Eastern Locris.

Although I shall not dwell too long on the period following the end of the Mycenaean age, we do need to consider an interesting piece of evidence. Excavations carried out in Pyrgos Livanates have shown, in the phase beginning after a mid-twelfth century earthquake, important elements linking this site to the sea. Thus, along with miniature models of commercial and war vessels, some craters with painted decoration depicting scenes of naval battles have been found. Since it seems that the pottery was manufactured *in situ* we can assume that it probably depicts actual acts of naval war and/or piracy, which would have been frequent in this turbulent period¹.

Some possible relationships, perhaps of an economic nature, between Locris and the eastern and northeastern Aegean during the Protogeometric Age had been suggested by the discovery at Troy of amphorae with parallels that indicate a place of production in the Locrian territory or neighbouring regions², although new researches suggest that at least part of them were locally manufactured in the Troad; however there are other wares in Troy (e.g. Gray Ware) which show

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¹ The ships represented in this pottery can be assimilated to Wedde's type V: «excellent as a fighting platform at sea ... yet equipped also with the capacity to transport soldiers and plunder»; cfr. Yasur-Landau 2010, 179.

² Catling 1998, 151-187.

similarities with ceramics from Euboea and Thessalo-Euboean area³.

Of course, we find the oldest literary reference to Locrian ships in the Homeric Catalogue of Ships which also provides the first information about the population of the Eastern Locris, and names its major cities. In this case "the Locrians that dwell over against sacred Euboea" brought forty ships under the command of Ajax the Lesser (Hom. *Il.* II 527-535).

Although of a late date and, therefore, raising many problems, we can mention here the information given by Pausanias about a town called Thronium in Thesprotia. As stated in the Catalogue of Ships, Thronium is one of the cities of the eastern Locrians (Hom. *Il.* II 533) and Pausanias explains the homonymy as follows: "When the Greek fleet was scattered on the voyage home from Troy, Locrians from Thronium, a city on the river Boagrius, and Abantes from Euboea, with eight ships altogether, were driven onto the Ceraunian mountains. Settling here and founding the city of Thronium, by common agreement they gave the name of Abantis to the land as far as they occupied it" (Paus. V 22, 4). The conquest by Apollonia took place in the first half of the fifth century BC.⁴ The actual existence of a town called Thronium in the region is attested by an inscription set up by Apollonia in Olympia after conquering and destroying the city, which was seen by Pausanias (V 22, 3) and whose remains were partly recovered during excavations in the sanctuary (*SEG* XV 251). Despite some problems, partly because of its link with the cycle of *nostoi*, some authors have accepted ancient Locrian and Euboean presence in those waters⁵ although the story might also be a late Corcyrean invention⁶, or even a distant echo of the conflict between the two peoples caused by the expulsion of the Euboeans from Corcyra by the Corinthians⁷. Unfortunately, this Thronium has been not identified with certainty⁸ and some authors even doubt the existence of an Eretrian establishment in Corcyra before its occupation by the Corinthians⁹. Anyway, this is not the only relationship between Locrians and Euboeans shown by our sources¹⁰, and all this area of the Northern Epirote coast is quite related to Locrian and Euboean navigations towards Central Mediterranean¹¹.

³ Rose 2014, 46.

⁴ Cabanes 2008, 171-172.

⁵ Beaumont 1952, 68.

⁶ Morgan 1998, 300.

⁷ Cabanes 2002, 63: «on pourrait alors penser que la guerre des Apolloniates contre Thronion s'inscrivait dans le prolongement de la lutte entre Érétriens et Corinthiens pour la possession de Corcyre».

⁸ Wilkes-Fischer Hansen 2004, 326, but see some suggestions about its possible location in Cabanes 2008, 171.

⁹ The historiographical controversy has been summarized by Antonelli 2000, 15-37.

¹⁰ Domínguez 2014, 189-210.

¹¹ Milán 2013, 98-99.

Anyway, the Locrians ended up founding their own colony in southern Italy, so they were probably engaged in exploratory activities in the Ionian Sea, perhaps along with Euboeans or Corinthians. In any case, we will refer later to other relationships between Locrians and Corcyreans.

As mentioned above, the Locrians settled in the Italian Peninsula and founded a colony to be called Epizephyrian Locris. Strabo says that the foundation of Locris took place shortly after the foundations of Croton and Syracuse (Strab. VI 1, 7). The foundation can thus be dated to the late eighth century, a date also confirmed by archaeological evidence¹². The first settlement was on a promontory, the Zephyrium cape, with a port protected from the west wind, or Zephyrus (Strab. VI 1, 7), and they remained there for three or four years until they settled in the final location (Strab. VI 1, 9). The ancient authors argued about which of the two Locris the settlers came from¹³. This uncertainty probably means that the colonists came from both Eastern and Western Locris and the Locrians' relationships with different territories across the sea during the eighth century may explain how the colony came to be founded and can, in turn, provide information about the alliances favoured by the sea.

Indeed, the region where Locrian settlement took place, for much of the second half of the eighth century, had been within the orbit of Euboean interests, and there was intense interaction with the natives, as shown by the local pottery production in the area¹⁴. Eastern Locrians and Euboeans, perhaps collaborating in maritime enterprises in the Aegean and maybe in the eastern Mediterranean, probably contributed to founding the colony or at least establishing a trading post on the Zephyrian Cape. It had an excellent position for helping seafarers and also provided a source of fresh water (Strab. VI 1, 7).

However, the literary traditions say that the move from the first settlement to the colony's definitive site was assisted by the Syracusans (Strab. VI 1, 7). This is curious in view of the support apparently given by Euboeans to Locrians when they first settled on the Zephyrian Cape. The explanation can be found in different friendships and interests within the group of settlers who, as mentioned before, came from the two Locris. Euboeans would have supported the Locrians' first settlement in the region, on the Zephyrian cape. Later, when more space was needed, perhaps when new problems arose in Greek Locris, aid came not from the Euboeans, but from their rivals the Corinthians. Located between Euboeans and Corinthians, the Locrians took advantage, alternately, of their good relations with both of them to found their colony.

In a different way, the tradition of the Locrian maidens, who had to be sent

¹² Costamagna-Sabbione 1990, 31-33.

¹³ All the sources have been collected by Niutta 1977, 260-261.

¹⁴ Mercuri 2004.

every year to Troy to atone for the crime committed by Ajax during the sack of the city, could be another sign of long-distance contacts maintained by the Locrians for much of their history¹⁵.

Let's look now at some data on the marine environments of the two Locris. Eastern Locris is a mountainous territory in which there are few wide plains; without a doubt the most important, and where the largest city rose, Opous, is the Atalanti plain. Divided into two parts by Mount Cnemis, Locrian settlement sought both the proximity of the sea and the protection provided by the mountains as well as control of the routes leading from the coast inland. The sea route that passes between the coast of Eastern Locris and Euboea was the main route linking the territories of northern and southern Greece¹⁶, because the route that followed the east coast of Euboea was beset by many dangers, as the Persians discovered in 480 (Hdt. VIII 13).

The main elements of the Locrian occupation of their territory were configured as early as the Archaic period. There was a succession of ports along the coast to which various ancient authors allude, although it is Strabo who gives us the most detailed information. The author proceeds from east to west: Larymna is mentioned first (Strab. IX 2, 13), and Halai (Strab. IX 2, 13; 4, 1) and Kynos are located in the Opountian Gulf. Kynos was the harbour (*epineion*) of Opous, sixty stadia away from the capital (about 11 km) (Strab. IX, 4, 1; Paus. X 1, 2). Halai and Kynos should be enough for the port needs of the Locrians in the Gulf because the island of Atalanta remained unoccupied until the Athenians set up a naval base there in 430 (Thuc. II, 32).

After the Opountian Gulf, the next port (*limen*) mentioned by Strabo (IX 3, 1) is Daphnous, 90 stadia away from Kynos (about 17 km). The next harbour (*limen*), whose name is not given, is twenty stadia away from Cnemis (about 4 km), where we do not know if there was a port; the unnamed harbour belongs almost certainly to Thronium, which is located the same distance inland (Strab. IX 4, 4); the Locrians who fought at Troy would have departed from the harbour of Thronium (Eur. *Iph. Aul.* 262-264). Skarpheia also had a port (Strab. IX 4, 4) and Nikaia was the main port for this part of Locris from the fourth century onwards (Strab. IX 4, 13); there was also a port on Alponos that had a watchtower (Strab. I 3, 20).

There is not too much information on the maritime activities of the Eastern Locrians, perhaps more because of the peripheral character of this area than for any other reason. Herodotus (VIII 2) refers to the seven penteconters that the Opountian Locrians contributed to the Greek fleet assembled to fight the Persians at Artemisium in 480. It is almost certain that the Locrians had more ships

¹⁵ On the Locrian Maidens, see most recently Redfield 2003.

¹⁶ See the evidence collected by Arjona 2013.

but their meagre participation may be explained, among other reasons, either by the type of ship they could afford or by their lack of enthusiasm for helping the Hellenic League because they had given earth and water to the Persians (Hdt. VII 132; Diod. XI 3, 2). However, as their soldiers were also at Thermopylae (Hdt. VII 203; Diod. XI 4, 6-7; Paus. X 20, 2; Strab. IX 4, 2), perhaps they could not refuse to contribute in some measure to the Greek fleet.

In 480 the penteconter was a fairly obsolete type of ship. We do not know if the Locrians had triremes but decided to provide penteconters instead, because they were not very enthusiastic about taking part in the campaign against the Persians. But it may be that this type of ship was more appropriate for the conditions of the Euboean Gulf; in fact, it was much cheaper than the trireme, and since they were used in a fairly enclosed area of sea, smaller ships may have been adequate for them. On the other hand, it was a versatile ship and very suitable for swift action, even amphibious, which allowed a quick return to the starting point. We can observe this attitude very well from what we know about the year 430, when the Athenians created a naval base on the island of Atalanta as the final result of the attacks on Locris that year. These attacks began a few months earlier when the Athenians sent thirty ships to the Locrian coast to protect Euboea. The Athenians carried out landings at certain places, and the main action was the capture of Thronium and the taking of hostages (Thuc. II 26). To prevent future Locrian attacks, the Athenians fortified the island of Atalanta (Thuc. II 32). What Thucydides describes as Locrian piracy (*lesteia*) against Euboea may have been due to the war, but we do not know whether such attacks were frequent at other times.

We have just one reference to shipbuilding by the Locrians. When the Spartans planned to create a new fleet of one hundred ships in 413 they assigned the construction of fifteen ships to the Phocians and Locrians (Thuc. VIII 3, 2), although it is unclear whether the fleet was ever built¹⁷.

The topography of the harbours in Eastern Locris is not well known, mainly because of lack of excavations. We must also take into account the major changes to the coastline since antiquity.

Remnants of a quay are known in Larymna, on the south-east side of the acropolis¹⁸. In Halai remains of submerged docks have been observed and it has been suggested that the foundation of this city in the late seventh century might be related to increasing maritime activity in these waters¹⁹. In any case, it is in an excellent position and its harbour is "extremely safe"²⁰. One of the oldest objects

¹⁷ Kagan 1987, 14-15.

¹⁸ Schäfer 1967, 528-545; Fossey 1990, 23; Haas, 1998, 101-102.

¹⁹ Fossey 1990, 42; cfr. Wren 1996, 97-98.

²⁰ Katsonopoulou 1990, 33.

so far found in Archaic Halai is a locally manufactured skyphos (*ca.* 625 BC), manufactured by a potter called Epopheles, which shows, among other terrestrial animals, also a dolphin²¹.

A site has been excavated in Pyrgos-Livanates, which overlooks the sea; it was occupied from the Bronze Age to the Hellenistic period. The port possibly lies at the foot of it to the north, and a submerged structure has been interpreted as the remains of a pier. Its identification with Kynos seems quite likely²².

At Daphnous, undoubtedly located at Hagios Constantinos, it is difficult to know exactly where the port was. Similarly, in Cnemis, where a port could have existed, a number of blocks submerged just below Mount Cnemis, in a place known as Mavralitharia, have been tentatively identified as the remains of a port.

As for the port of Thronium, the problems that could be posed by the mouth of the Boagrius River need to be taken into account. The city was nearby, and according to the distances given by Strabo, it is quite likely that its port was in the area of what is today Kamena Vourla, which has a small bay. There is a curious structure, a boulder detached from the mountains, with a number of steps carved on one side of it and a number of recesses in its upper part, which may be related to its function in the port, perhaps as a watchtower. It is approximately 400 m. away from the present coastline at an altitude of 34 m. above sea level, to which we must add the 6 or 7 m. or height of the rock. It may have been a lookout tower (a *hemeroskopeion*) or a tower for light signals rather than a rock-altar, as had been suggested²³.

Little is known about the port of Skarpheia. There is evidence of the remains of a construction in the area around Molos in which a relief dated to the fourth-third centuries BC was found, which depicts the wedding of Poseidon and Amphitrite, with abundant marine motifs (Nereids, Hippocampi), a very appropriate subject for a maritime environment²⁴.

We have no information for the harbour of Nicaea, while some data are available for Alpenus. There is a sketch drawn by Oldfather in 1937 in which a "Harbour gate" is depicted in the northeast of the site implying that the port was in that area²⁵. Although there are few remains of constructions on the ground, there is a natural block of limestone which is located right in the far north of the site, called "rock bastion" in Oldfather's drawing. This has been identified by some authors with the Melampygos stone mentioned by Herodotus (VII 156)²⁶.

²¹ Coleman 1992, 275.

²² Fossey 1990, 82; Δακορόνια 2010.

²³ Oldfather 1940, 108; Pritchett 1985, 177-179.

²⁴ Daniel 1904, 56-57; Demangel 1932, 498; Béquignon 1937, 240.

²⁵ Sketch published by Pritchett 1985, 186.

²⁶ Marinatos 1951, 57.

In any case, this rock, overlooking the ancient coastline, may also have served as a watchtower and perhaps as a natural landmark marking the entrance to the port.

If we move to Western Locris, we also have important evidence of its relationship with the sea. Naupaktos is clearly one of the most important ports on the north coast of the Gulf of Corinth, especially because of its proximity to Antirrhium, where the crossing to the Peloponnese is shorter. This explains why Naupaktos appears to be linked to some of the most ancient Greek traditions, such as the occupation of the Peloponnese by the Heraclidai (Strab. IX 4, 7). Long before its occupation by Athens, Naupaktos may have been of key importance for the Locrians. Thanks to an inscription, we know that it was recolonized by both Eastern and Western Locrians, probably because it was so important²⁷.

It was occupied by the Athenians around 456 and a force of Peloponnesian Messenians was probably settled there very soon after by the Athenians (Thuc. I 103, 1-3; Diod. XI 84, 7-8). They remained there until 401 when they were expelled after Athens lost the Peloponnesian War (Diod. XIV 34, 2-6)²⁸. The reason for the occupation is not entirely clear but it may have to do with the city's naval capacity and perhaps with its predilection for piracy. Although I will not deal with it here in detail, the Peloponnesians' difficulties of sailing in the Gulf of Corinth during the Peloponnesian War clearly underline the strategic importance of the location of Naupaktos²⁹.

In addition to historical episodes, Naupaktos also appears in several traditions linked to the incidents surrounding Hesiod's death and the miraculous recovery of his body. According to the various traditions, Naupaktos or Oineon was the place where Hesiod was murdered and Molycria and Rhium the sites to which dolphins brought his body, revealing that he had been murdered and leading to the punishment of the murderers.

Similarly, Naupaktos may also have been related to traditions of long-distance voyages through its possible association with the myth of Jason and the Argonauts. Certainly, part of that myth is recounted in the epic poem Naupaktia, known to the ancients (Paus. II 3, 9; X 38, 11) but lost to us³⁰. Some authors have suggested a link with the traditions concerning the Euboean colonial enterprises at Coreyra frustrated by the Corinthians³¹.

To the east, some centres that are not directly on the coast should have ports, such as Eupalion and Oineon (Thuc. III 95, 3-96, 2). Perhaps one of those harbours may have been the Erythraia mentioned by some sources (Liv. XVIII 8, 8).

²⁷ Van Effenterre-Ruzé 1994, 178-185.

²⁸ Domínguez 2006, 39-73 and 2007, 79-101.

²⁹ Freitag 2005, 67-86, 338-342.

³⁰ Matthews 1977, 189-207.

³¹ Debiasi 2004, 62-69.

The next place of interest is undoubtedly Oianthea. The importance of Oianthea as a port and even its maritime activities are highlighted by two inscriptions. One of them, found in Corcyra, was part of the cenotaph of a certain Menecrates of Oianthea, built by his brother Praximenes. It is dated between the last quarter of the seventh century and mid-sixth century. Menecrates is depicted as *proxenos*, and despite the arguments that the text and the monument have prompted, the existence of relations of *proxenia* between Oianthea and Corcyra shows that the Locrian city had maritime contacts with the outside world, including the important site of Corcyra, key to communications with the Adriatic Sea and Magna Graecia³².

Another epigraphic document of great importance is the treaty or *symbolon* signed between Oianthea and the city, also West Locrian, of Chaleion and preserved on a bronze tablet, dated to the first half of the fifth century. It regulates the right of reprisal between the inhabitants of the two cities and the judicial procedures to be followed to obtain compensation. The agreement provides that foreigners and their assets may be freely apprehended at sea, but not in the harbour which lies at the foot of the *polis* (*plan el limenos to kata polin*), a situation that may relate to the two cities. Clearly the agreement seeks to prevent looting by the citizens of the two cities while declaring the harbours safe places. This also indicates that those who were not subject to these bilateral agreements could still carry out such acts of piracy, which also demonstrates the Locrians' normal way of life in relation with the sea³³.

Further east, after the ports of Phaistinos (Plin. *NH* IV 7) and Tolophon (Dio Per. 66), was the last of the major ports of Western Locris: Chaleion, which has already been mentioned. It seems that its main deity was Apollo Nasiotas, although there are suggestions that the sanctuary was actually on an island rather than on the acropolis of the city³⁴.

As in Eastern Locris, we have little archaeological data on sites and harbour works in Western Locris. For Naupaktos the most we can say is that the current port (the so-called "Venetian port") was unable to hold large numbers of ships, so it is quite likely that they would seek places to anchor elsewhere, taking advantage of the coastline around the city. It is not improbable that the Naupaktians would also have used the mouth of the river Daphnus (modern Mornos) as a port: at that time it was certainly not as silted up as it is today (see, for instance, Plut. *Mor.* 162d). The small bay of Monastiraki may have been the port of Erythrai, which could have served also Eupalion or Oineon. Some other bays further east may also have served as ports or landing places, but were certainly

³² Van Effenterre-Ruzé 1994, 146-148.

³³ Van Effenterr-Ruzé 1994, 216-221.

³⁴ Lerat 1952, I, 205; II, 151-152; Σκιαδάς 1999, 61.

of little importance.

There is no sign of the harbour of Oianthea (present-day Paralia Tolophonos) possibly because it lies to the east of the ancient settlement in an area that has been much filled in. There is still a medieval tower beside the beach, built with ancient ashlar, and just to the south of it some submerged structures are visible, but we do not know their date. Tolophon used the small bay of Aghioi Pantes, at the mouth of the valley on which the city stood, as a harbour. Finally Chaleion, located in the present Galaxidi, had two ports separated by a peninsula ("*nasos?*") projecting into the sea. This area must have been occupied from Archaic times, although it seems that until the Late Geometric period the main settlement was on the hill of Aghios Athanasios, which dominates much of the Gulf of Itea from a height of 320 m, and where there is a fortified precinct and a wall of about 200 m which crosses the valley south of the site³⁵.

To conclude this brief panorama of the Locrians' relationship with the sea, we can say, firstly, that the data we have are fairly limited, both because of the lack of attention given to those territories by the ancient authors and because there has been little archaeological excavation.

However, we have collected data that show an early interest in the sea which can be observed from at least the eighth century through the development of trade networks, linking Locrians to the main naval powers of the age, such as Corinthians and Euboeans. The foundation of their colony in Italy benefited from the good relations between people from the two Locris with their respective neighbours. Although in different contexts, the two Locris used their location on two key coastal stretches of the Greek maritime networks in order to earn their livelihoods: the use of their harbours and sometimes piracy must have been a significant source of income for the Locrians. Such activities, as Thucydides claimed "came to be the main source of their livelihood, no disgrace being yet attached to such an achievement, but even some glory" (Thuc. I 5, 1). The two Locris organized their settlement so they could get the most out of the area's natural conditions: they sited their cities along major roads and established their ports at the best available sites on the coast³⁶. It can be seen how, even in the case of Halai, its late foundation meant the addition of another coastal point of control on the route that ran along the Euboean Gulf.

The result of this intense relationship with the sea was the existence of early institutional developments. From the Locrian world comes the oldest testimony of the existence of *proxenoi* and one of the oldest rules regulating the practice

³⁵ Baziotopoulou-Valavanis 1993, 189-209.

³⁶ Domínguez 2009, 1195-1205.

of *sylan*³⁷ as well as the establishment of "neutral" places where the city itself prevented pirate activities. However, outside the harbours, plunder and depredation must have been quite frequent on account of the relatively closed areas which characterize the marine environments of the two Locris. Furthermore, Thucydides explicitly refers to Western Locrians as habitual practitioners of piracy (Thuc. I 5, 3), something that is unsurprising in a society that was still so strongly aristocratic. Only forceful action could prevent such activities, as evidenced by the Athenian occupation of the island of Atalanta or, from another perspective, the Athenian occupation of Naupaktos. Clearly, the suppression of piracy required the control of the bases used by the pirates³⁸, but we have no evidence that anyone, before the fifth century, was actually able to do this³⁹. On the other hand, and apart from some specific cases, Locrian cities were usually a few hundred metres inland and if they were on the coast, they were heavily fortified to prevent attacks by pirates. Even in their early colonial activity, the Locrians initially chose to settle in a defensible and strategic location from the point of view of sea routes, before settling in their ultimate location. Perhaps they were following the example of their Euboean allies, who in those same years of the late eighth century were settling in Zancle and, as Thucydides (VI 4, 5) says, the first who settled there were some pirates from Cumae.

We can therefore be sure that the sea was a vital source of livelihood for the ancient inhabitants of the two Locris. Before the appearance of great superpowers in the fifth century, the Locrians ruled the seas in front of their cities. Harbour taxes, trade and piracy complemented farming, which perhaps offered fewer rewards than the sea in most of their territories.

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³⁷ Bravo 1980, 675-987.

³⁸ De Souza 1999, 11.

³⁹ On the Athenian actions against piracy and its projection into the past through the myth of Minos, see De Souza 1999, 26-33; this scholar, however, outlines how this policy must be understood within the war operations of the Peloponnesian War and not as a fight against piracy in general by Athens or the Delian League.

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Abstract

The two Locrian territories were open to the sea: Eastern Locris to the Euboean Gulf, Western Locris to the Gulf of Corinth. My paper reviews the role played by the Locrians' control of important sea tracts in archaic and classical times and the evidence of the uses made by the Locrians of the sea. The development of trade, war, piracy, colonisation, law, are analysed in the Locrian context to show how also a region traditionally regarded as backward made extensive use of its sea coast as a tool of power and external relations. Lastly, a review of the evidence regarding the harbour installations both in Eastern and Western Locris is presented.

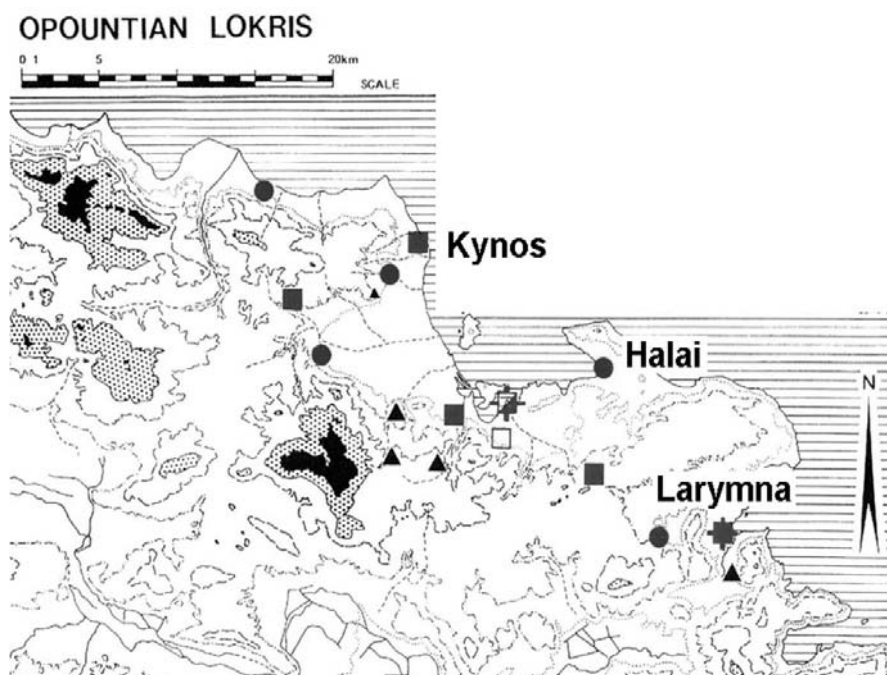


Fig. 1: Opountian Lokris

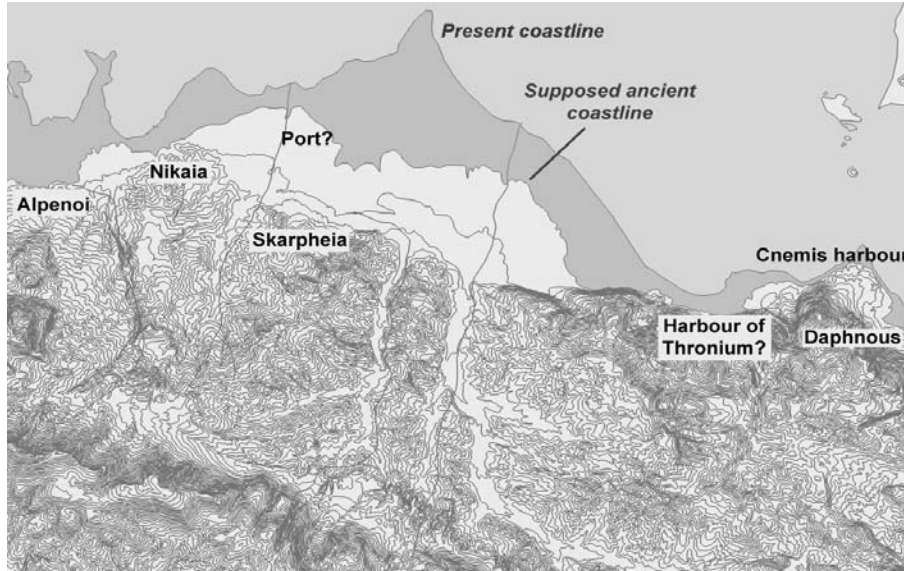


Fig. 2: Epicnemidian Locris

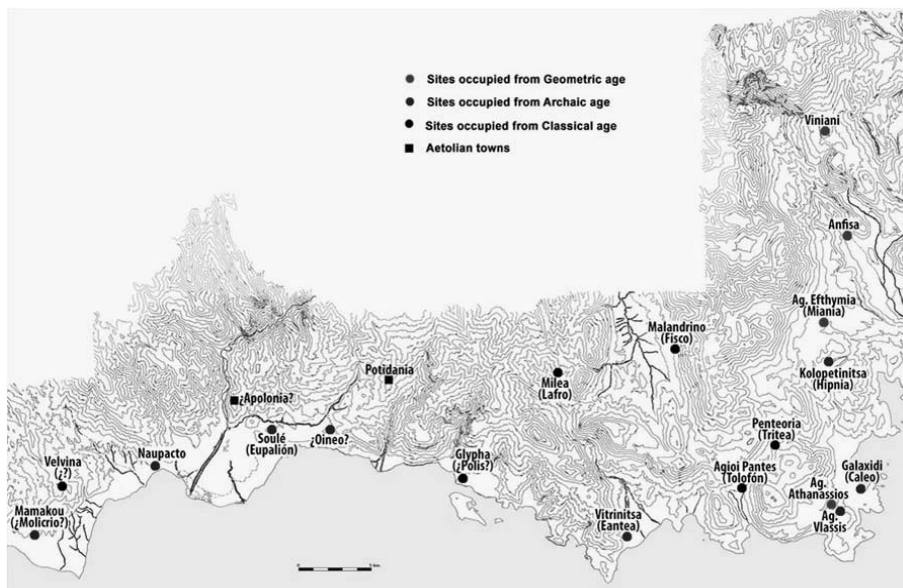


Fig. 3: Western Locris