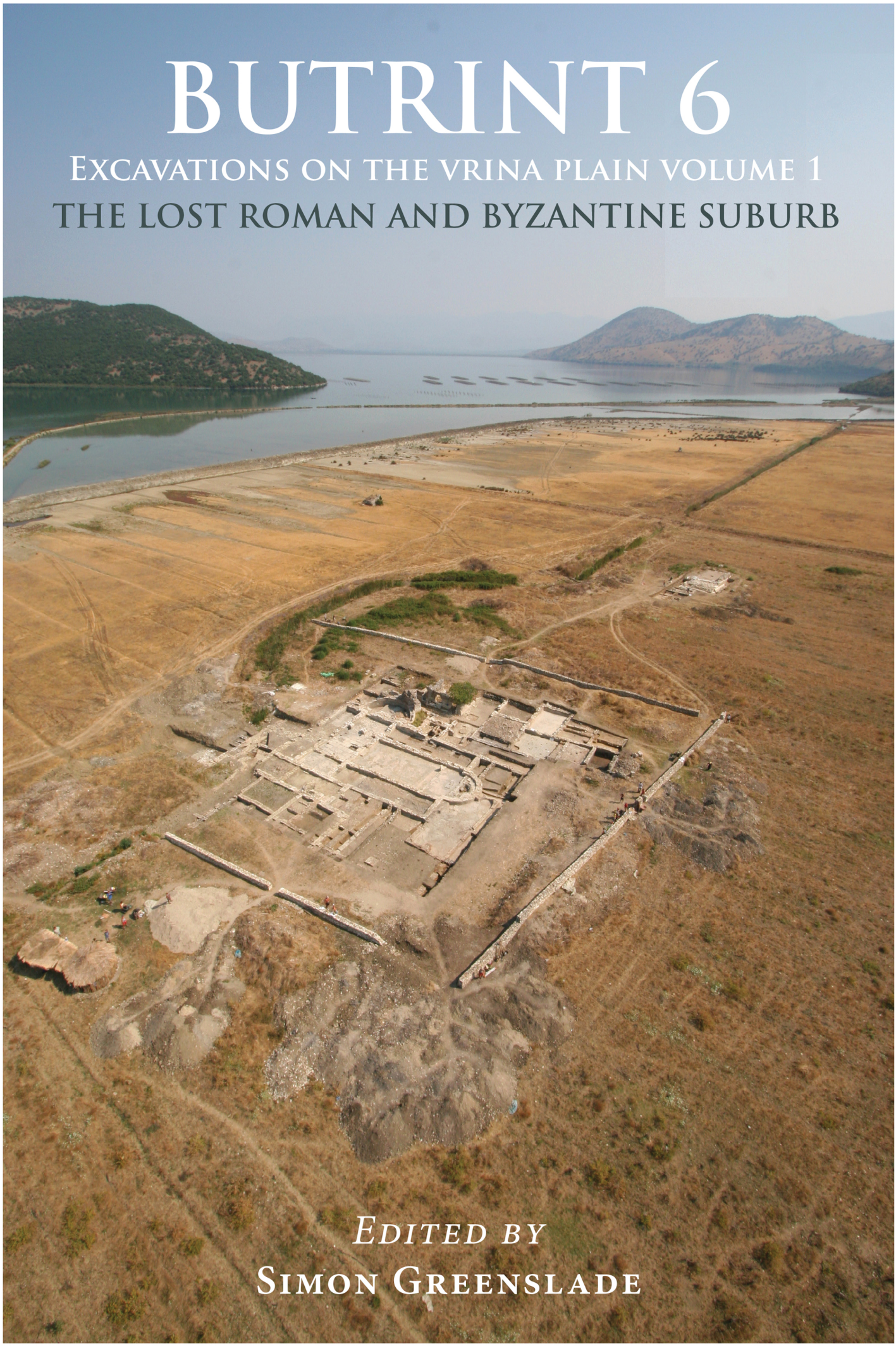
# BUTRINT 6

## Excavations on the Vrina Plain Volume 1

## The Lost Roman and Byzantine Suburb



*Edited by*

Simon Greenslade

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## EXCAVATIONS ON THE VRINA PLAIN

## Volume 1

### THE LOST ROMAN AND BYZANTINE SUBURB

## Butrint Archaeological Monograph Series:

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*Front cover*: View of the Vrina Plain excavations with Lake Butrint beyond (by Alket Islami)
*Back cover*: Details of various panels of the 6th-century mosaic pavement from the Vrina Plain basilica (by Sarah Leppard)

# Contents

# Preface and acknowledgements

*Simon Greenslade and Richard Hodges*

> Our microecological model answers, then, to the direction that some urban economic historiography has hesitantly taken. It encourages us to conceive towns less as separate and clearly definable entities and more as loci of contact or overlap between different ecologies. Towns are settings in which ecological processes may be intense, and in which the anthropogene effect is at its most pronounced. But they are not – or not simply by definition – more than that. And they should not be presented as conceptually detachable from the remainder of the spectrum of settlement types.
>
> Horden and Purcell[1]

> Linking the contextual materiality of contemporary deposits with the contextual conditions of history should allow us to proceed towards an enhanced understanding of the strategies of historical production and thus towards things that we did not previously know.
>
> Barrett[2]

The 'ruralising' of urban history by Horden and Purcell in their influential *The Corrupting Sea* has met a sharp response from ancient historians, many of whom would empathise with William Harris in arguing that this approach shrinks into insignificance the whole category of the town or city.[3] Strangely, though, few archaeological projects around the Mediterranean have set out to resolve this issue of urbanism in context. Instead, the debate mostly centres upon poorly excavated and poorly dated archaeological evidence, as well as hypotheses constructed upon wafer-thin evidence. The Butrint Foundation's project from 1994 to 2012 at ancient *Buthrotum* in south-west Albania offered an opportunity to test this concept of a town as one of a 'spectrum of settlement types'.

The UNESCO World Heritage inscription of Butrint in 1992 took no account of the context of the Graeco-Roman town of *Buthrotum*. Nor, notwithstanding surveys of the Vrina Plain made by Dhimosten Budina in the 1960s, was there any understanding of an extra-mural settlement – a suburbium of sorts – on the south side of the Vivari Channel. In their studies of Butrint, Luigi Maria Ugolini in the period 1928–36 and post-war Albanian archaeologists shared a paradigm of Butrint that simply accepted that the boundaries of the town were defined by its fortifications.[4] It is easy to understand why these archaeologists reached this conclusion. Their world-views were shaped by an urban model that was, for a long time, shaped by resistance to external forces at odds with Albanian nationalism.[5] Fortifications defined this resistance; beyond these lay a peasant world that was entirely different (and for the most part perceived as primitive). The UNESCO inscription in 1992, albeit an early index of Albania's transition to democratic government, merely codified an earlier archaeological model.

Indeed, even after the first remote sensing showed the extent of settlement on the Vrina Plain, and the systematic recording of the archaeological remains in a long east–west drainage ditch confirmed this in July 2002, there was Albanian resistance to accepting its existence. In August 2002, Dhimetër Çondi published an article in the national newspaper, *Shekulli*, contending that the remains on the Vrina Plain were those of the celebrated (Republican) villa of Titus Pomponius Atticus. This villa is known to have existed in the environs of Butrint,[6] so the attribution carried some weight, except that none of these remains, as this detailed report shows, is securely Republican Roman in date. Instead, the report here presented charts the making of an early Roman bridgehead community beside the Vivari Channel, aligned to the centuriation of the reclaimed lands to the east of Butrint. There followed several significant habitations, each different in form and importance to Butrint itself: first, a major 3rd-century villa or *domus* ranking with the largest of its kind in the province of Epirus Vetus, which in turn was transformed into a new residential centre dominated by a Christian basilica in Late Antiquity, which then in the 9th century, before the revival of Butrint as a walled urban centre in the later 10th century, became the home of an administrator, probably a Byzantine *archon* commanding the region, and was, in all but name, Butrint.

*Figure 0.1. The road to Vrina looking towards Butrint 1961*

With changing environmental conditions, much of the area became a wetland in the Later Byzantine period[7] and for this reason remained beyond the gaze of the Italian Archaeological Mission led by Ugolini in the 1920s and 1930s. It was the building of a road to Butrint for Nikita Khrushchev's visit in May 1959,[8] and with it in 1961, following the political shift by the Albanian government from a Soviet to a Chinese alliance, a road to the frontier village of Vrina that opened up Butrint not only to visitors but to modern farming methods (Fig. 0.1). Soon afterwards, during the 1960s, there followed the systematic drainage of the Vrina Plain, part of a programme of larger agricultural works in Albania, and its cultivation by a collective farm (Fig. 0.2). With these large-scale agrarian works the measure of the archaeology in this suburbium first began to become evident.[9]

These intricate excavations between 2002 and 2007 bear out John Barrett's dictum that patient excavation provides new light on historical production in numerous ways. Without doubt these excavations greatly enlarge the urban story of the Ionian port of Butrint, occasionally offering support for Horden and Purcell's 'spectrum' model and at other times support for Harris's refutation of it.

## Acknowledgements

The carrying out of such patient excavations requires a large number of people to be thanked. First and foremost we are gratefully indebted to Lord Rothschild and Lord Sainsbury of Preston Candover, trustees of the Butrint Foundation, who with patience have supported the excavations throughout. A huge debt is also owed to the Packard Humanities Institute and especially its President, Dr. David Packard, who has been a very supportive partner in this project.

We are especially indebted to Sir Patrick Fairweather, formerly British ambassador to Albania (1992–96), and from 1997 to 2004, the Director of the Butrint Foundation. Thanks also to Daniel Renton, Director of the Foundation between 2004 and 2006 and to Rupert Smith, Director of the Foundation 2007 to 2008, who as well as visiting the excavations often during the seasons both spent a few days digging on them too; and to Brian Ayers, Director from 2008 to 2012.

Our thanks to Iris Pojani and Diana Ndrenika, successive Directors of the International Centre for Albanian Archaeology in Tirana. Thanks also to our Albanian colleagues: Lorenc Bejko, Neritan Ceka, Ylli Cerova, Dhimetër Çondi, Reshad Gega, Ilir Gjipali, Shpresa Gjongecaj, Gjerak Karaiskaj, Telemark Llakhana, Etleva Nallbani, Guri Pani and Artan Shkrelli. Finally, we owe a special debt to the Director of the Institute of Archaeology during the course of these excavations, Professor Muzafer Korkuti.

Richard Hodges and Gjergj Saraçi served as co-directors of the Butrint Foundation project from 1994 to 1996; and Richard Hodges and Kosta Lako with Ilir Gjipali were co-directors from 1998 to 1999. Richard Hodges and Ilir Gjipali were co-directors from 2000 to 2009.

The six field seasons ran between June and July 2002 to 2007. Although the temperatures during these months were sometimes in the high 30s, this period was the best time to excavate as the water table was at its lowest, the water dropping over 1 m from the start of the season to the end.

Between 2002 and 2004 the drainage ditch excavations were managed by Ryan Ricciardi, assisted by Saimir Shpuza (2002), Andy Crowson (2003), Simon Greenslade (2002, 2004) and Sarah Leppard (2004). The 2005 to 2007 excavations of the basilica and *domus* were directed

*Figure 0.2. View of the Vrina Plain from Butrint 1971*

by Simon Greenslade and Sarah Leppard. In 2008, the exploratory excavations were carried out by Simon Greenslade who also over saw part of the initial backfilling of the site by the workmen and women of Shën Dëlli.

Throughout the six seasons Oliver Gilkes oversaw the student training programme and excavations, ably assisted by a dedicated team of young Albanians: Sinderealla Golemi (2002–03), Nevila Molla (2004–06), Elda Omari (2006), Valbona Hysa (2006–07), Sinoida Martallozi (2006) and Gjerg Vinjahu (2006–07). Further support in supervising these student excavations was provided by Benen Hayden and Riley Thorne in 2004 and by Emily Glass and Matthew Logue in 2005.

Despite the extreme temperatures and the occasional torrential rainfalls and associated thunder and lightning, the excavations from the start were undertaken by an enthusiastic number of experienced archaeologists from a wide range of UK-based professional contract units, along with Italian and American university graduates, and members of the Albanian Heritage Foundation (Fig. 0.3). We are especially grateful to all these people, particularly Vincent Mougin, Grace Corbett, Riona McMorrow, Phil Jeffries, Matthew Logue, Pete Crawley, Dawn Gooney, Elliot Heilman, Laura Morabito, Alessandro Sebastiani, Cath Ambrey, Esmeralde Agolli, Emily Glass, Nathan Chinchen, Andy Phelps, Pippa Lacey, Amy Culwick, Helen Robertson, Giulia Vollono, Elda Omari, Sinoida Martallozi, Valbona Hysa, Riley Thorne, Stuart Randall, Ilion Velagoshti, Michael Esposito, Reuben Thorpe, Efthymios Rizos, Klodiana Kondo, Polly Mitchell, Christina Tub and Mary Welsley.

Local workmen and women from the village of Shën Dëlli also assisted in the excavations. Although they were generally used for the removal of vegetation and topsoil, their hard work and hospitality throughout the seasons was greatly appreciated by everyone involved.

Site photography was by Sarah Leppard, Oliver Gilkes, Andy Crowson and Simon Greenslade, as well as by members supervising the student training programme. Kite photography was by Massimo Zanfini, who also did all the photogrammetry of the mosaics. Aerial views of the excavations were taken by Alket Islami. Views of the Vrina Plain from Mount Mile were by Brian Donovan.

All drawings on site were done by members of the various teams and digitised by Simon Greenslade, who created all the illustrative work from these. The reconstruction and cut-

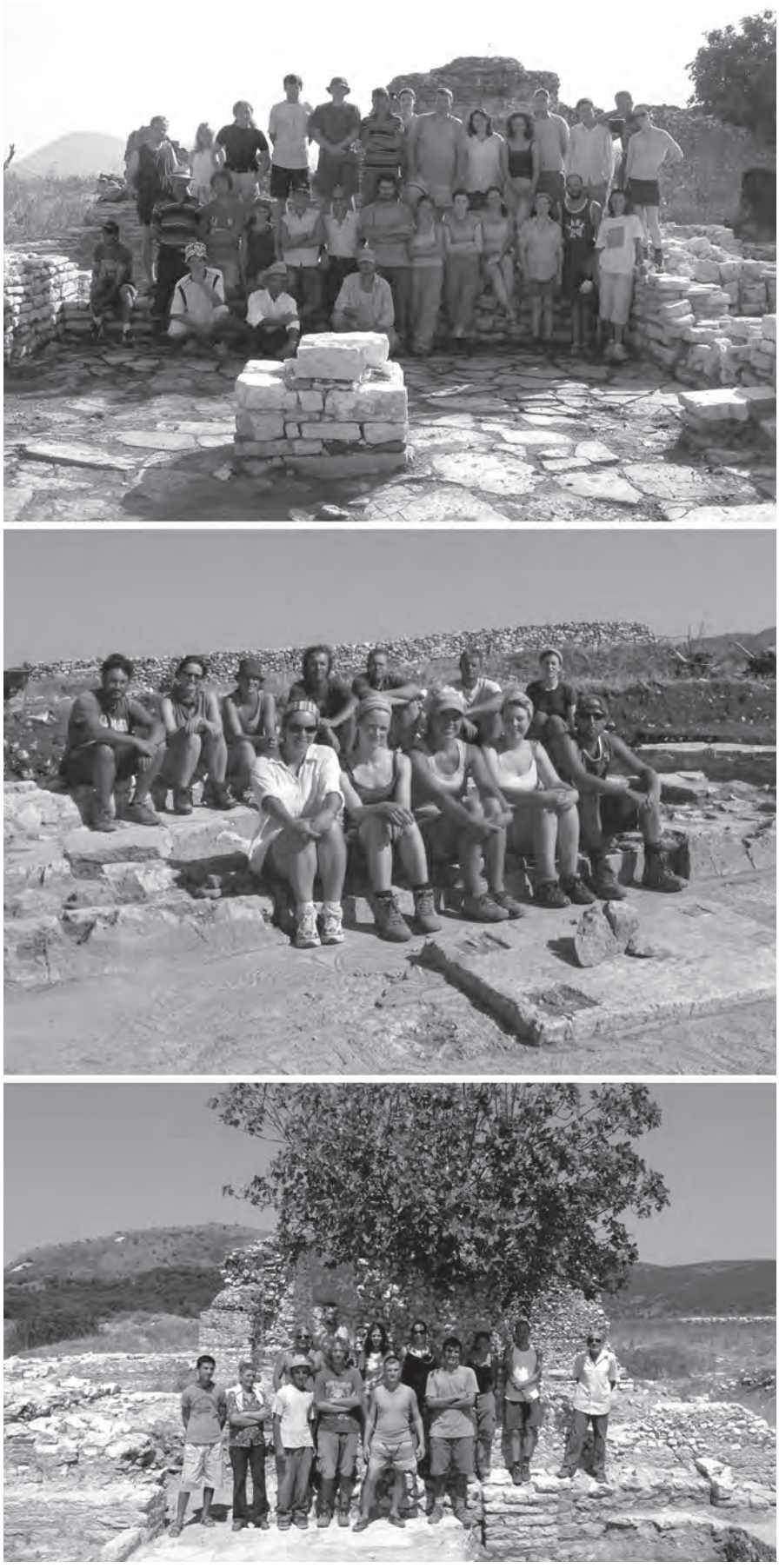

*Figure 0.3. Members of the 2005, 2006 and 2007 Vrina Plain excavation teams*

away images of the Vrina Plain *domus* and basilica, together with the Triconch *domus*, were produced by Sarah Leppard, who also assisted in the digitising of the original site plans. The nave mosaic was digitised by Simon Greenslade, while the sanctuary mosaic was digitised by Sarah Leppard. In completing this task a big thank you must be made to Massimo, for without his initial photogrammetrical image of the basilica mosaic creating the final plan of this complex pavement would have been very difficult.

The processing of the finds was managed by Dave Boschi and Inge Lyse Hansen, assisted by Sabina Veseli and Ilir Papa, while the conservation of the finds was organised by Pippa Pearce. Finds photography was carried out by James Barclay Brown, Michael Grayley, Martin Smith and Sarah Leppard, while finds illustration was done by Adelheid Heil and Julia Jarrett. A number of finds illustrations were done by Dave Boschi and digitised by Sarah Leppard, who also digitised a number of unfinished Adelheid Heil pencil drawings. The Roman pottery has been studied by Paul Reynolds and the medieval ceramics by Joanita Vroom. The mosaics were studied by John Mitchell who also studied the small finds. The Roman coins have been studied by Richard Abdy and Sam Moorhead, and the Byzantine and medieval coins by Pagona Papadopolou, who also studied the medieval lead seals. The late Sarah Jennings was responsible for the glass. Unfortunately this exceptional lady, who it was a privilege to know, never managed to finish her study due to her untimely death, but partly owing to her copious notes it has been possible for Karen Stark to produce a representative catalogue of the glassware from the Vrina Plain. As well as glassware, the Vrina Plain also produced a number of glass cakes, ingots of raw glass associated with glass working; these and a number of glass *tesserae* were studied by Nadine Schibille. The human remains were studied by Todd W. Fenton, Angela Soler, Carolyn V. Hurst, and Jared Beatrice, while Adrienne Powell managed all the faunal remains, assisted by Richard Madgwick who is owed a great deal of thanks for writing the finished faunal report. The marbles recovered from the Temple Mausoleum were studied by Inge Lyse Hansen. The archaeobotanical material has been studied by Alexandria Livarda, while the archaeomalacological (mollusc) data has been collated by Rena Veropoulidou and by Matthew Law and Richard Madgwick.

The copy editing of the three volumes was done by Catrina Appleby.

The Vrina Plain excavations are indebted to Dave Bescoby, who not only made the very first exploratory trenches in 2001, which gave tantalising glimpses of what was to come, but carried on supporting the excavations with all its surveying needs, without which the planning and recording of the site would have been almost impossible. Dave continued throughout the seasons to study the geomorphology of the plain and its seismic episodes and is responsible for working out the ancient shorelines which provide invaluable information for understanding the layout of the archaeological remains.

Any excavation needs a welcoming waterhole at the end of a heavy day in the blazing sun (or a torrential thunderstorm) and so it is to Tani Çeliku and his bar that a huge thank you must also be made in this roll of acknowledgments. Whatever the day brought he was always there with a smile, a cold beer, snacks, a chat and good music (always assuming you liked Heavy Metal (!)). A big thank you must also be extended to Tani's wonderful parents, Agim and Futuretta, whose amazing hospitality made us all feel like we were one of the family. Guzuar!

To all these must be added a number of other individuals who need not be named but almost certainly know who they are. Since 2012, getting this report to this point has been a massive and at times challenging undertaking but through their constant support this wonderful site has once again come alive, and hopefully this report does their belief in it justice.

From a few upstanding remains in an apparently flat agricultural landscape, no-one could have expected just how much the Vrina Plain excavations would expose of a history closely tied and at times overtaking that of the city across the Vivari Channel, and so to everyone who helped in revealing this story and to making this publication possible, a huge thank you is owed. To all these people this volume is dedicated.

### *Notes*

1 Horden and Purcell 2000, 100–01.
2 Barrett 2006, 210.
3 Harris 2005, 29.
4 Cf. Hodges 2013.
5 Bowden and Hodges 2004.
6 Cf. Hansen 2009.
7 Bescoby 2013.
8 Hodges 2009.
9 Cf. Budina 1971.

# 1 The history of the Vrina Plain

*Simon Greenslade*

## Location

The Vrina Plain lies to the south of the city of Butrint (Fig. 1.1). Bordered to the southwest by the Korafi hills and stretching to the southeast as far as the conical hill of Çuka e Ajtoit, close to the Greek border, this alluvial valley covers an area of approximately 20 km². Dotted across this seemingly flat plateau are a number of limestone outcrops upon which the modern-day settlements of Shën Dëlli, Xarra and Vrina are located. A further outcrop is that of Kalivo, bordering the southern margin of Lake Butrint (Fig. 1.2).

The Plain is separated from Butrint by the Vivari Channel which links Lake Butrint to the Straits of Corfu. This saltwater channel was originally the mouth of the River Bistrica, which ran into the north end of Lake Butrint.

Central to the plain is Lake Butrint, which covers an area of 1600 hectares. The quality of the water in the lake can be divided into two distinct layers. The upper layer (approximately 8 m in depth) is rich in oxygen and supports a diverse marine culture. The salinity of this layer changes seasonally from winter to summer. The lower layer (approximately 14 m in depth) lacks oxygen and is sulphurous. The lake is rich in fish species including mullet, eel, bream, wrasse, sardine and anchovies. Mussels are the predominant mollusc and have been farmed in the lake since 1968. The north and south shores of the lake today are flanked by saltwater marshes with associated amphibian, reptile and bird populations.

To the southeast of Lake Butrint is the much smaller Lake Bufi. This covers an area of 83 hectares and has an average depth of 1 m. Fed by freshwater springs, it originally drained into Lake Butrint but is now connected by a cut channel that allows water to flow either way between the lakes. As a result, saline water from Lake Butrint has increased the salinity of Lake Bufi.[1]

The pastoral aspect of the low-lying area visible today is largely a result of the implementation of a state-run collective agricultural policy by the communist government of the 1960s and 1970s, based on a model developed by the Chinese, their ideological allies at the time. With the institution of state farms at the villages of Xarra and Vrina, woodland which had covered much of the plain was removed and a grid of large irrigation channels was dug across the plain in order to drain the marshy area, thereby creating a usable space for crops and animal grazing.

## The formation of the Vrina Plain

Like many coastal locations within the Mediterranean Basin, the Vrina Plain is a dynamic and continually evolving landscape, created by a complex interaction of natural and human processes over the last 15,000 years. Changes in sea level and the climate as well as tectonic movements have all had a pronounced effect on the plain's evolution (Fig. 1.3). Even today the scale of this can be seen with regard to the modern coastline which is now over 2 km west of the once-fabled port city of Butrint, with seaward access via the Vivari Channel.

Sedimentary analysis of core samples taken across the area would seem to indicate that the entire plain, together with Lake Butrint and Lake Bufi, once formed part of a large coastal bay of the Ionian Sea stretching potentially as far as Phoenice to the north and Mursia to the southeast.[2] From around 5200 BP the bay appears to have begun to silt up with alluvial material brought down by the Pavllas and Bistrica rivers, the two main rivers of the area. This created a mixture of marsh and wetland habitats interspersed with small islands separated by narrow channels. These changes seem to have been accelerated by changes to the environment connected with the opening up of the Holocene vegetation, beginning about 6600 BP and becoming much more pronounced after about 4000 BP.

By 2700 BP the sediment input appears to have increased and the development of the plain was dominated by the growth of large deltas to the seaward side of Butrint, resulting in the formation of a stable alluvial floodplain with well-drained soils suitable for agrarian settlement. There are likely to have existed at least two major channels running

*Figure 1.1. The Vrina Plain looking south from the acropolis of Butrint city*

along the axis of the valley, depositing sediment into the bay from an extensive inland catchment. Smaller channels relating to more local catchments would also have formed, one draining the now lagoonal Lake Bufi, and another, located to the east of present day settlement of Shën Dëlli, draining from the high ground east of Xarra. These would have contributed to marshy deltaic formations extending northeastwards towards the city of Butrint. By this stage the original bay was separated from the coast by a narrow channel, which may have had important consequences for the operation of a port at Butrint.

With the water table dropping, land on the south side of the channel became elevated above the waterline, and except after thunderstorms or prolonged winter rain, must have been exposed and covered in vegetation. From the middle of the 1st century AD, continued silting resulted in a number of topographical high points with sufficiently well-drained alluvial soils to allow for the expansion of a suburban settlement beyond the confines of the earlier city. Channels, by now much reduced in size, are likely to have been relatively stable, with a sediment load dominated by fine silts forming cohesive banks fixed with vegetation. Strabo (VII.324.446), the 1st-century geographer, associates Butrint's harbour with *Pelodes Limen* or muddy harbour. Whether he had actually visited the town is doubtful; more probably he had heard from merchants or travellers who recalled disdainfully the murky waters in the Vivari Channel. Even today heavy storms wash down soil from the surrounding hills which darkens not only the rivers but also Lake Butrint, leaving great muddy fans exuding from the mouths of the channels into the Straits of Corfu, a situation Gerald Durrell clearly describes in *My Family and Other Animals*.[3]

Throughout this time the Vrina Plain was constantly evolving. The establishment of the Roman colony is likely to have brought about extensive regional landscape modifications. Centuriation along the valley would have been an integral part of the colonial landscape remodelling and drainage schemes may also have been implemented. Sedimentary deposition continued during the Roman period as catchment modifications, including channel straightening, deforestation and urbanisation, will have affected the rivers' sediment loads and increased the potential for flooding. Field investigations upon the plain have identified Roman Republican layers buried beneath up to 1.20 m of alluvium.[4] Archaeometric evidence suggests that channel silting increased around AD 450–500, possibly linked to changes in Roman agricultural practice and associated sea-level rises. This in turn led to the submergence of the Roman levels.[5]

The changes continued into the medieval period, with renewed inundation of former wetlands possibly increasing the size of the large delta around the mouth of the sea inlet. This may relate to the medieval revival of Butrint and the renewed utilization of the alluvial plain, especially along the levee banks of the main channels flowing down the valley, offering well-drained fertile soils.

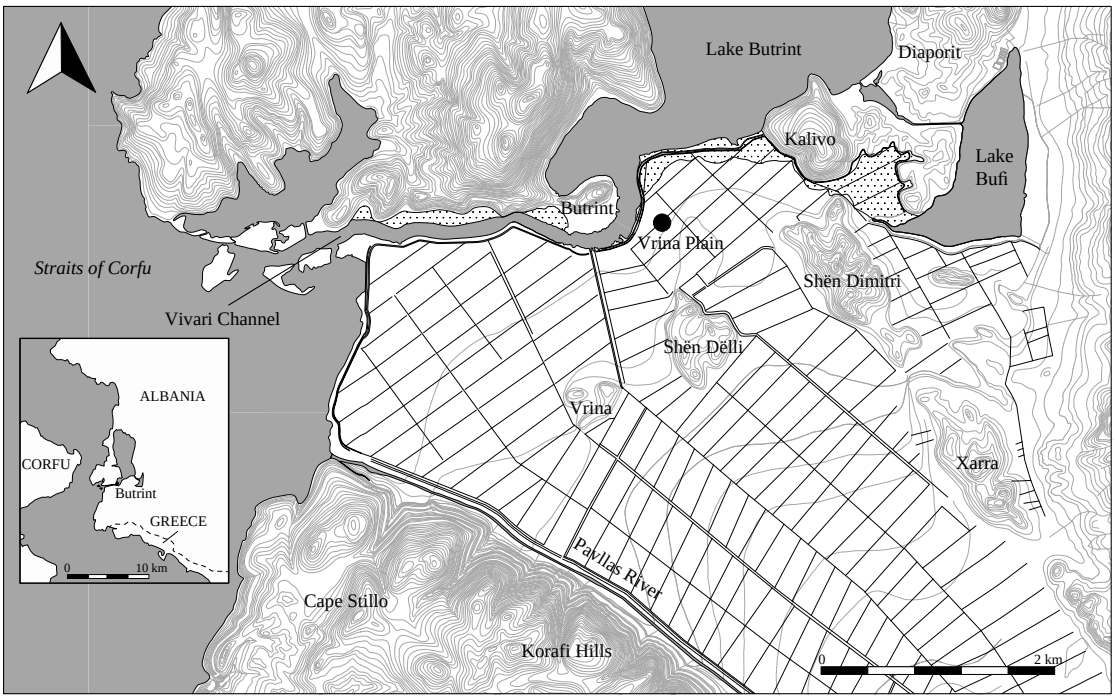


*Figure 1.2. Location map showing the Vrina Plain*

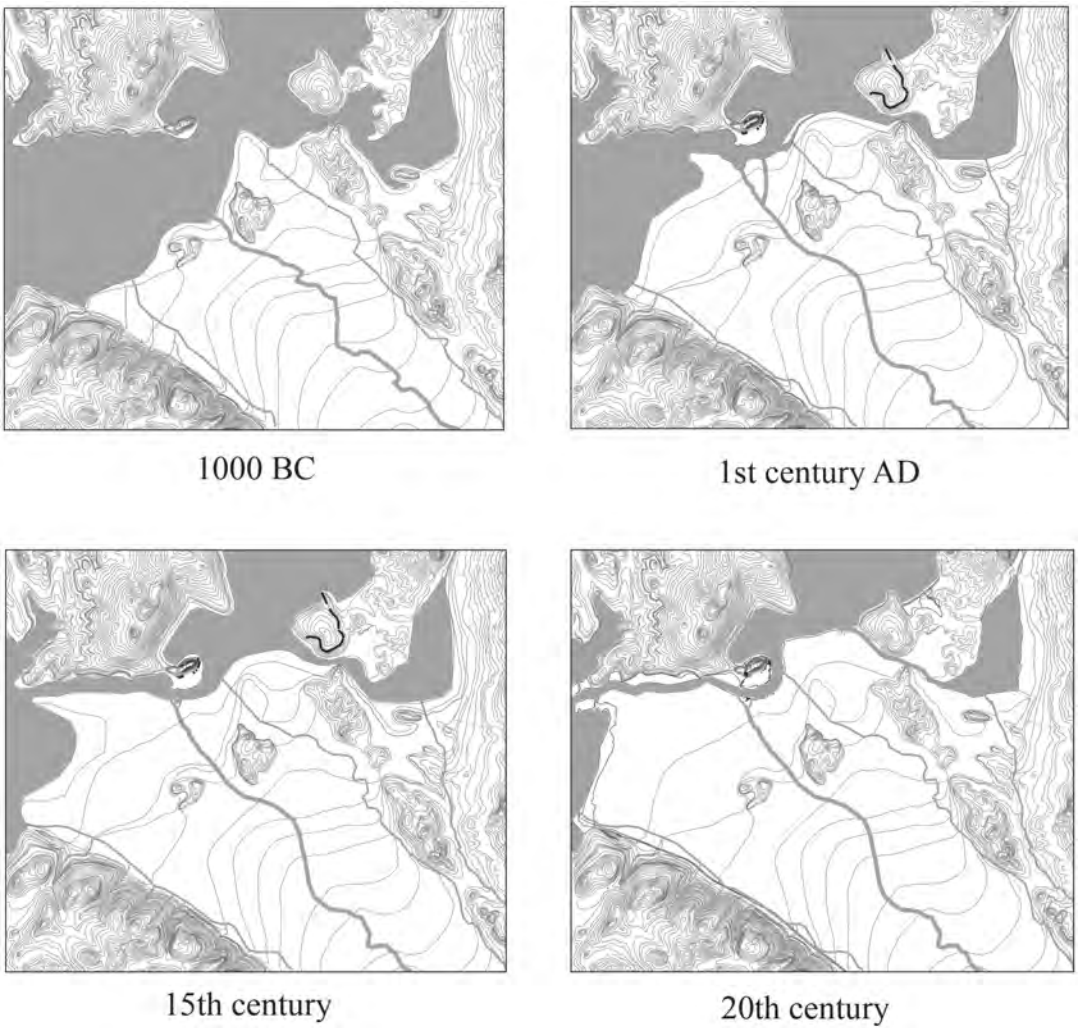


*Figure 1.3. The development of the Vrina Plain*

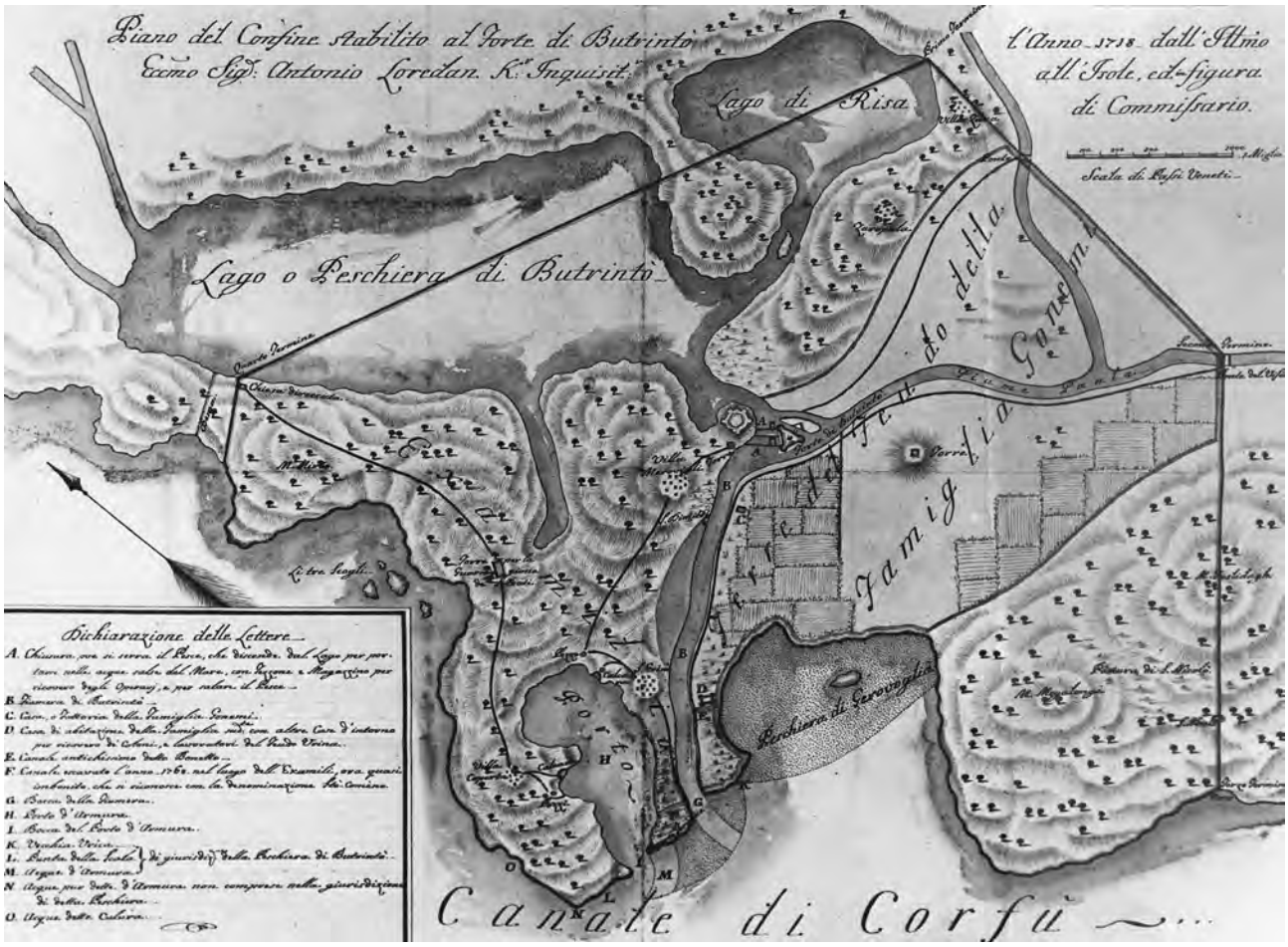


*Figure 1.4. Cadastral Map of 1718 (Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome)*

It would appear that by the 18th century the plain had predominately reverted to a wetland marsh environment, which may reflect a relative rise in sea level, again as a result of subsidence in the area.

The earliest detailed map of the Vrina Plain, a 1718 Venetian Cadastral map, records it as an area of low hills with beyond it, towards Kalivo, *paludo* – marshland (Fig. 1.4). In 1818 the British, Austrian and Neapolitan governments undertook a combined venture to survey the Albanian coastline under the command of Capt. W. H. Smyth. Published in 1825, Smyth's map for the Admiralty, *Chart of the Channels of Corfu with the Adjacent Coast of Albania*, clearly depicts the Vrina Plain as having the same topography as that of the 1718 map. In the following year, the *Carte physique historique de la Grèce* by the French Lt. General Comte Guilleminoit was published with an inset map of Butrint.[6] The French never undertook a comprehensive survey of southern Albania but based the map partially on the observations of French Grand Tourists who had visited the site and partly on military data collected during the short-lived French occupation of the Ionian islands in the late 18th century. Again the map depicts the area directly opposite the city of Butrint as a marsh.

Smyth's charts were updated in 1840 when Butrint Bay was fully sounded,[7] and again in 1863 when Commander A. L. Mansell and HMS *Firefly* undertook an extensive new survey of the area, despatching surveying parties inland to create the first true topographic survey of Butrint and its immediate environs.[8] On this survey, published in 1865, the Tchiflik Plain, as it was named, was again depicted with the same topography seen on the earlier maps. A hydrographic survey of the same period by Mansell does, however, note tall reeds and swamp in the area where part of the Roman town has been found recently.[9]

These first efforts at mapping are confirmed in a number of descriptive accounts by visitors who were in the area at the time, principally W. M. Leake and Francois Pouqueville, the rival British and French diplomats at the court of Ali Pasha of Tepelena, who both visited Butrint in 1805. Describing his arrival at Butrint by boat Leake wrote:

> As we approach Vutzindro (Butrint), the water becomes muddy, and in the bay is almost fresh. This bay is very shallow on the northern side, and the bar at the mouth of the river will even now, when the water is still at the highest, but just admit of the entrance of kaiki, or small coasting vessels. We row three maybe four miles up the river, through a plain once perhaps the property of Atticus, a friend of Cicero, and now peopled with horses from the neighbouring village.[10]

*Figure 1.5. Sketch by Edward Lear made on the Korafi Hills looking northwards towards Butrint and the Vrina Plain (Private Collection)*

*Figure 1.6. The Vrina Plain as seen from Mount Sotira, 1920s (Instituti i Arkeologjisë, Tirana)*

Pouqueville on the other hand was a bit more damning in his view of the uncomfortable conditions he found:

> The air of these lakes, and consequently of Butrinto, is now as pestilential as that of the famous Pontine marshes of Italy. The effects of this air are dreaded even across the sea in Corfu…[11]

In 1857, Edward Lear visited Butrint a number of times whilst living in Corfu, sketching the plain from two angles: the Korafi Hills (Fig. 1.5), and from Mount Sotira looking down over Butrint to the Vrina Plain beyond. In both cases he depicts the plain as essentially featureless with low hills.[12]

The area was essentially unaltered in the 1920s when Luigi Ugolini began his excavations at Butrint (Fig. 1.6). Ugolini found the plain densely wooded and marshy in parts, and although he noted the presence of a number of extant Roman ruins, no attempt was made to clear or record them in detail. This topography is also confirmed by the Royal Air Force photographs taken in November 1943 (Fig. 1.7), as well as by the childhood memories of Gerald Durrell who describes his hunting expeditions on the plain, along with the marshes between the Triangular Castle and Butrint Bay, in *My Family and Other Animals.*[13]

In recent decades the biggest impact on the plain has been the implementation of a state-run collective agricultural

*Figure 1.7. Aerial view of the Vrina Plain, 1940s (Crown copyright 1943/MOD)*

*Figure 1.8. View of the Vrina Plain today from Mount Mile (photo Brian Donovan)*

policy by the communist government of the 1960s and 1970s, based on a model developed by the Chinese. Following the creation of state farms at the villages of Xarra and Vrina, the plain, along with the area north of Lake Butrint, was cleared of vegetation, the streams and creeks canalised and the area systematically levelled using heavy earthmoving machinery and bulldozers. Low stepped ridges of earth just to the south of the present-day excavations show where the bulldozers actually halted before the masonry remains. Where possible standing structures were left undisturbed, although in some cases these were smashed or moved: for example, some piers of the aqueduct near the village of Xarra were shifted several metres from their original positions. The flattened area was then drained by a series of deep linear channels, some of which were up to 2 m deep, that form a grid across the plain. The resulting spoil from these operations seems to have been removed and used to create the dykes that were constructed as part of the programme along the edge of Lake Butrint. To control the flow of water in the ditches a pumping station was built which still survives just west of the Triangular Castle. The area was then worked by a collective farm from Shën Dëlli, with maize being the principal crop.

Since 1991, when the state collective farms ceased operating and the network of drainage ditches was no longer maintained, the plain has changed once more. Increasingly the landscape is returning to its previous condition, as it was in medieval, Venetian, and Ottoman periods (Fig. 1.8).

## Background to the excavations

The first scientific exploration of the classical Greek and Roman remains in the environs of Butrint was undertaken by the Italian inter-war archaeological mission to Albania led by Luigi Maria Ugolini.[14] This mission noted the presence of a number of extant Roman ruins on the plain but because of the dense woodland and marshy conditions made no attempt to clear or record them in any detail.[15] Subsequent research in the 1960s and the 1990s by the Albanian Institute of Archaeology was largely restricted to a number of investigations focused around the standing remains, including a slot dug across the interior of the apsidal building, some surface survey and small-scale excavation trenches, and the recording of finds made during further land improvement.[16]

Following the collapse of the communist government, at the invitation of the Albanian Institute of Archaeology, the Butrint Foundation has conducted an intensive field survey on the south side of the Vivari Channel, covering the area between the Korafi Hills in the west, Xarra in the south and Kalivo in the east, to help place the city of Butrint in the context of its contemporary hinterland.[17]

Initially, an environmental survey of the area was carried out, in which 22 cores were taken along the distal limits of the plain close to the Vivari Channel so as to gain a preliminary understanding of the sedimentary sequence and stratigraphic development of the plain.[18] These hand-augured borings reached a maximum depth of 7 m and although they did not reach bedrock, revealed a

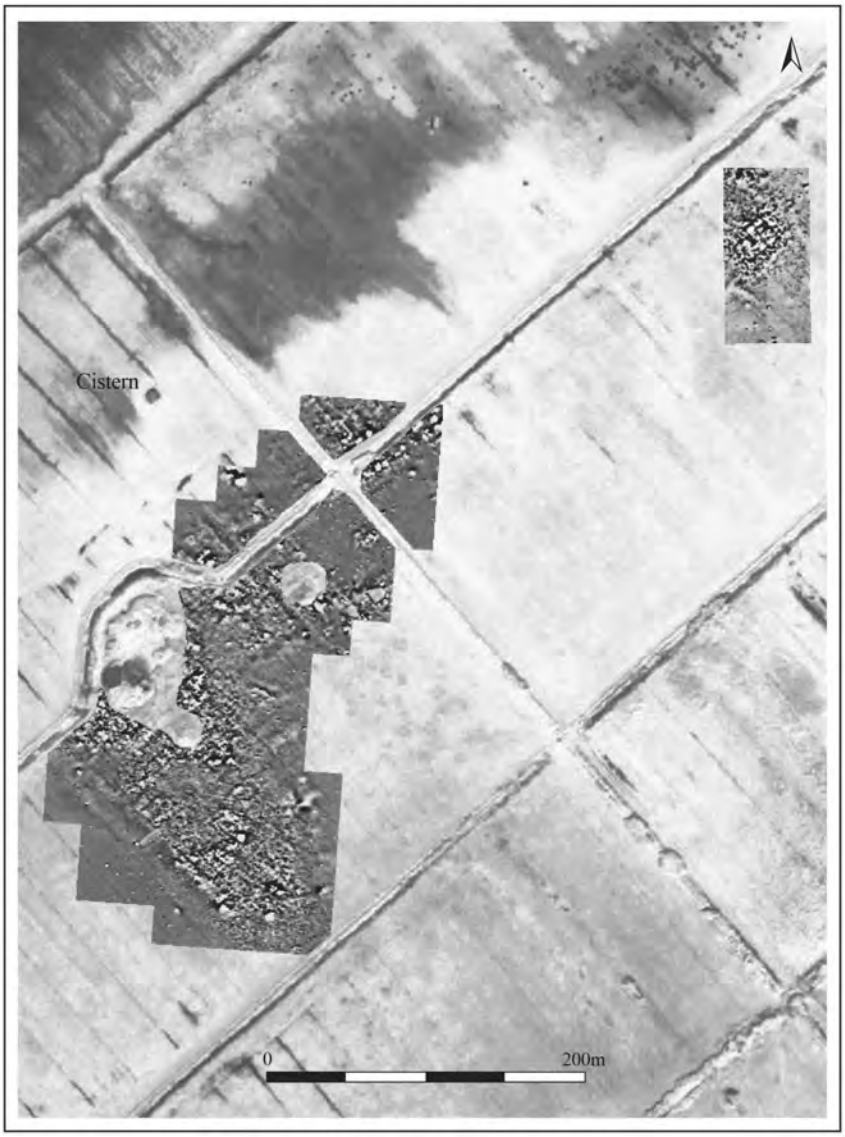


*Figure 1.9. The geophysical plot of the main area of the Vrina Plain settlement as well as the outlying eastern Roman residence (after Bescoby 2007)*

complex succession of sediments showing a transition from marine conditions, through a fairly short-lived estuarine environment, to the development of an alluvial plain. As part of this study a core was also taken from Lake Bufi, which, due to its small catchment size, was considered the best source of proxy environmental indicators in the Butrint area. Two subsequent borehole transects were also undertaken close to the extant buildings in order to examine the underlying geomorphological formation and establish the environmental framework for the settlement.[19]

A field survey was undertaken in 1994–96, the aim of which was to examine the nature of the archaeological settlement pattern within the immediate environs of the city of Butrint.[20] The survey was limited to four areas to the south and east of Butrint, covering six different types of terrain. Although it provided information on a range of sites from the prehistoric through to the Roman period, it was noted by the author that the conclusions reached had to be treated with caution as the visibility of sites could be skewed since the differing alluviation processes identified by the sedimentary survey meant that the surface scatters did not necessarily reflect the true pattern of human settlement in the landscape.[21]

In order to understand and interpret the surface remains better a proton magnetometer survey was undertaken by the Albanian Institute of Archaeology in April 1995. This led to a geophysical survey undertaken by the School of Environmental Science from the University of East Anglia and GSB Prospection Ltd on behalf of the Butrint Foundation between 1998 and 1999.[22] The survey was carried out using two techniques: an area covering approximately 20 ha was surveyed using a Geoscan FM36 fluxgate gradiometer at a sensitivity of 0.1nT; and 4 ha with a Geoscan RM4 ground resistivity meter with a 1 m electrode spacing (Fig. 1.9). Between 2000 and 2001 an area covering 3.7 ha of the original survey was re-surveyed

*Figure 1.10. View of the Vrina Plain excavations looking along the line of the drainage ditch*

using a caesium vapour magnetometer.[23] The results of these surveys were tested by trial excavations in 2001.[24]

Overall the ground-penetrating survey work identified extensive remains of destroyed masonry structures set within what seemed to be an orthogonal street grid. Combined with the ceramics found across the entire area, the resulting data led to the conclusion that potentially this had actually been a suburb of Roman Butrint, quite possibly the first elements of the colony created by Julius Caesar in 44 BC and re-established by Augustus after his victory at Actium in 31 BC. As a result of this, from 2002 to 2007 a major archaeological assessment was undertaken by the Butrint Foundation in order to test this theory and to try and understand the extent and character of the archaeological remains.

## A brief overview of the excavations

The excavations were initially centred on one of the large drainage ditches which criss-cross the plain (Fig. 1.10). Unlike the majority of the ditches, which ran straight across the plain, the ditch chosen to be investigated had been dug with a large kink in it. This deliberate bend was necessary in order to avoid a series of upstanding remains, consisting of a number of buildings in varying states of preservation that formed a visible marker on the plain. These included a large semicircular building of tile and masonry, a two-roomed structure just to the east with walls standing 2.60 m from the modern ground-surface, and the corner of a building infilled by rubble dumped probably from the 1960s clearance; this rubble included one block decorated with wreaths and garlands framing a trident in relief – thought to be a fragment of an altar dedicated to Neptune.

At the time local shepherds were using the ruins as a convenient pen for their sheep during a regular cycle of milking. The southern room of the two-roomed structure had been converted into a small hut with a wicker superstructure supporting a thatched roof; Roman tiles had been recycled to form a sleeping platform adjacent to an open fire. The flat area to the northeast of the second room was used to contain the sheep after milking, the surrounding vegetation having been permitted to grow to form a natural palisade. A milking pen connected this to an area to the north of the semicircular structure that was used as a gathering point.

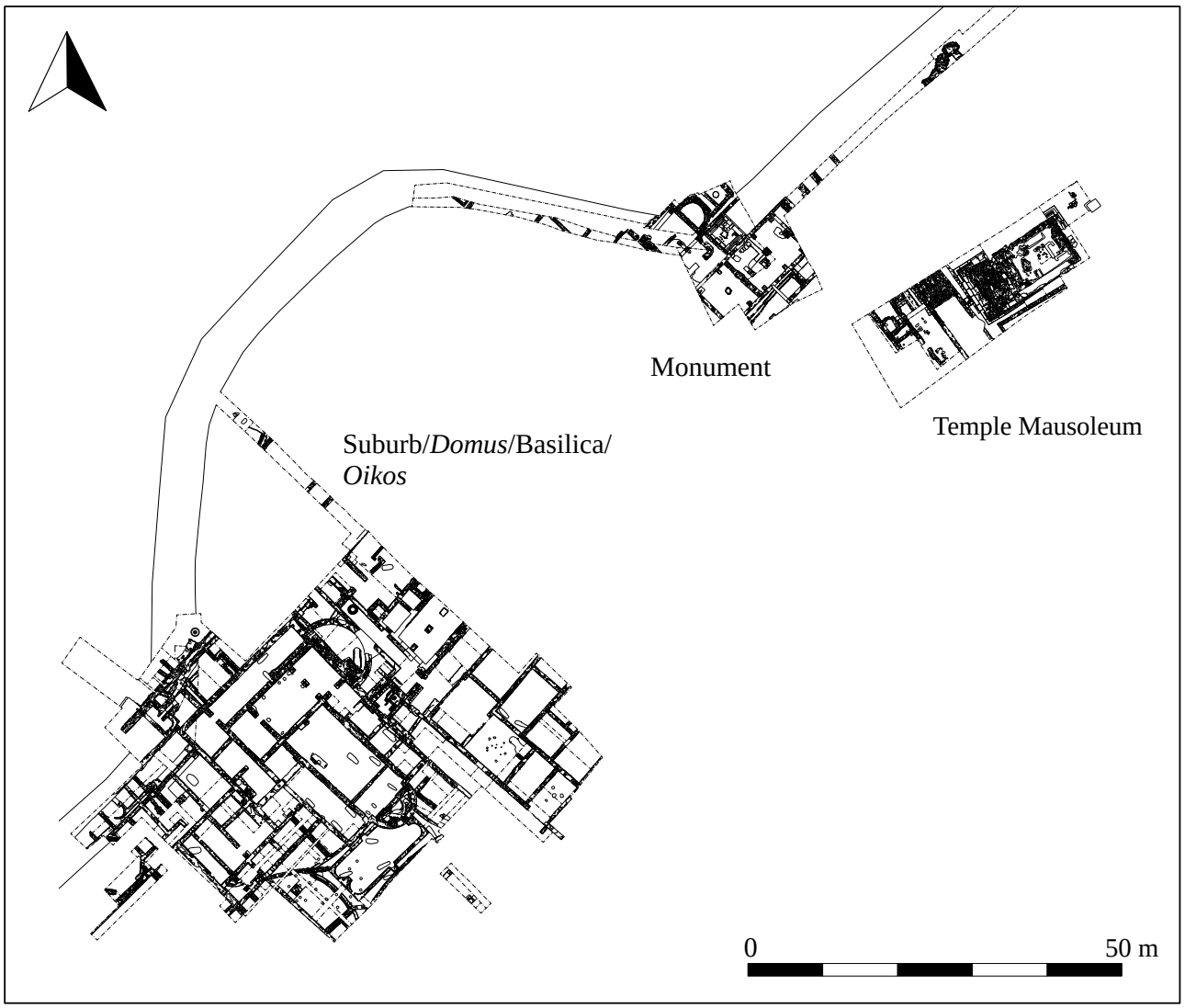


*Figure 1.11. The Vrina Plain excavations*

The ditch was treated as an evaluation trench: the sides and base were cut back and cleaned, and all exposed features fully recorded. In all, a length of roughly 250 m was investigated. In order to form a connection with the standing remains a further trench, measuring 67 m, was dug at right-angles to the ditch at its western end. These carefully controlled excavations exposed a cross-section of the Vrina Plain settlement and offered an important first insight to the dating and layout of the settlement, as well as confirming the complexity of the initial geophysical survey.[25] Among the features exposed during the evaluation was a collapsed arch of the aqueduct, along with the base of a finely worked square monument. Elements of a substantial bath-house and cistern were also exposed within the area of the standing remains. Following the completion of the 2002 assessment the area to the west of the cistern was further investigated by the Albanian Institute of Archaeology. This rudimentary clearance excavation removed a large amount of deposits and exposed various phases of walling and features of all periods.

Following on from these trial excavations, a number of areas were examined in greater detail (Fig. 1.11). One of these excavations was centred on the square monument.[26] Along with identifying a contemporary surface of limestone slabs located along the northern edge of the monument, the excavations uncovered a series of walls of later rooms enclosing the northern, southern and western sides of the monument. The eastern side seems to have remained open, indicating that the monument could still be accessed despite the construction of the surrounding buildings. Only the southern room was fully exposed and was found to consist of a rectangular structure with annexed spaces to the east and west of it. This building appeared to have undergone a complex sequence of rebuilds and alterations over time, including at one point the addition of nine internal masonry piers/buttresses along with an internal division wall to support a second floor. At some point the role of the surrounding buildings was altered when an apsidal-ended building was constructed to the northwest of the monument, built partially over the northern buildings.

A second open-area excavation was focused on a rectangular structure located to the southeast of the square monument which had initially been excavated by the Albanian Institute of Archaeology in the late 1980s.[27] Due to its proximity to the aqueduct, the piers of which were located *c.* 3.30 m to the east of it, this structure had been interpreted as a bath-house or cistern dating to the early Imperial period. Cleaning and recording of the building revealed that the structure had been built upon a podium and had been accessed from the west, where the robbed-out impression of a staircase was found fronting the building. Within the building the impressions of five rectangular structures were found at its eastern end. Such an internal arrangement seemed at odds with the original interpretation of the building. The earlier excavations had recovered various sculptural pieces across the site, including fragments of a head and torso as well as reliefs and architectural fragments that appeared funerary in nature. As fragments of human bones were also found within the backfill of the 1980s excavations the building was reinterpreted as a mausoleum that had been built to look like a raised temple.[28] Subsequent excavations along the sides of the mausoleum revealed further traces of broken sculptural pieces as well as *in situ* fragments of the lower marble facing of the building, indicating that this would have been an imposing structure. New excavations were also carried out to the west of the building where part of an earlier north–south-aligned road fronting the steps of the mausoleum was exposed; on the opposite side of the road a pavement was found fronting the colonnade of a portico that would have faced the mausoleum. Over time this western area appears to have been gradually altered: a series of crudely built structures made of rough clay-bonded stone and tile walls was found built over the line of the proposed portico. Fragments of masonry from the Temple were found in some of the walls of these buildings.

The largest and most intense area of excavation was centred on the upstanding buildings. Between 2004 and 2007 an area roughly 65×45 m was excavated, generating almost 1200 contexts from which large quantities of Roman and medieval pottery were collected as well as over 600 small finds, including almost 500 coins. These results, combined with the structural remains, have enabled the creation of an important picture of a changing landscape from the 1st century AD to the 13th century AD (Plate 1.1).[29]

The earliest evidence of occupation on the site dates to the mid-1st century AD when a series of buildings of varying sizes was constructed across the site, some of which fronted onto a road. By the 2nd century AD, occupation had expanded and a new cistern was built near the eastern edge of the site in order to meet the demands of an expanding populace. By the mid-3rd century, the nature of the occupation had changed and the area seems to have come under the control of one individual, who constructed a large and spacious peristyle *domus* across the site. To allow for the construction of this large structure the earlier buildings were either demolished, as in the case of the buildings found to the west of the site, or they were integrated into the new build, as seems to be the case for the eastern buildings. The suburban townhouse was occupied until the mid-4th century, at which point it was abandoned. This period of abandonment was only for a short period as by the start of the 5th century the site was reoccupied and a number of alterations were made to the standing buildings. By the beginning of the 6th century the townhouse had been modified with the construction of a north–south-aligned apsidal basilica, floored with a series of intricate mosaics.[30] The religious focus of the site appears to have lasted till the middle of the 6th century when the site was abandoned, possibly as a result of it having been partially damaged by fire. For the next three hundred years the site was deserted but in the mid-9th century the buildings were reoccupied, becoming the manor-house or aristocratic *oikos* of a Byzantine official, possibly the commander of Butrint. The deposits that infilled the abandoned buildings were cleaned out and the buildings repaired. A small cemetery was created in the area of the former courtyard. Across the site more than 50 Byzantine coins spanning the period *c.*AD 820–950 have been found in post-occupation deposits. These, along with the ceramic assemblage and the discovery of five lead seals, would seem to indicate that by the mid-9th century the site had become a centre of regional, as well as international, administration. This centre was occupied until the middle of the 10th century when, due to problems with a rising water table, the administrative focus shifted back into Butrint. From this time onwards the buildings appear to have collapsed and become an easy source of stone, some of which may have been quarried to construct the new defensive walls that were built around the lower shoreline of Butrint. Despite this, the southern end of the basilica remained a focal point, with a devotional element indicated by three child burials centred on the sanctuary and apse of the earlier building. With the collapse of the apse sometime after the mid-12th century, a 'black earth' deposit built up over the remains. This post-abandonment deposit, varying in depth from between *c.* 0.35 m to 0.60 m, contained a mixed ceramic assemblage with material from the 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 6th centuries, as well as ceramics covering the period from the 9th to the 13th century. The coin finds cover a similar wide range. Among the latest coins are three of Manuel Comnenus I (AD 1143–80). The sanctity of the site was preserved as a number of burials were found cut through these deposits within the ruins. The final visible activity across the site was a series of post-holes cut through the black soils indicating seasonal occupation by local shepherds, along with a rock pile that may either have been stockpiled from the quarrying of the decaying building or been collected-up by a farmer following ploughing and deliberately dumped at the edge of his field.

In all, the excavations identified 16 phases of activity covering the period from the mid-1st century AD up to the modern day. These phases are summarised in Table 1.1 and visually by Plate 1.2.

*Table 1.1. Overview of the development of the Vrina Plain settlement: Phases 1–16*

| *Phase* | *Date (AD)* | *Domus area* | *Monument area* | *Temple Mausoleum area* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Mid-1st–early 2nd century | Initial occupation: road system and number of large, well-appointed houses constructed, some incorporating shops fronting the roads | Roadway, building and smaller structure associated with early suburbs | |
| 2 | 2nd–early 3rd century | Development expands: large cistern and series of new houses built. Some of earlier buildings altered | Phase 2a: evidence of use in area in form of either a paved precinct or early monumental structure – Monument 2 – built into early to mid-2nd century layer | Aqueduct constructed, cut into deposit containing Late Republican pottery. Two-roomed building located to the west of it |
| | | | Phase 2b: Monument 1 built slightly over Monument 2. Monument 2 potentially used as pavement in conjunction with Monument 1. Monument 1 cut into a 2nd-century deposit with a late 2nd century related occupation layer. Two votive boxes built along southeastern side. Monument 2 eventually covered over within this period | |
| 3a | Mid–late 3rd century | Occupation changes: site taken over by a single residence, a large double peristyle *domus* | Continued use of Monument 1 shown by occupation layers dated to early–mid-3rd century associated with the monument | Road layout altered with the construction of *domus* across western suburb. Large Temple mausoleum constructed along eastern side of new road; new service building with portico built to west |
| 3b | Early–mid-4th century | Encasing wall built behind the apse of hall and new bath-house added to east. Octagonal tower added to western bath-house. Small-scale alterations to East wing and Southern Building | | |
| 4 | Late 4th century | Villa abandoned as result of earthquake<br>Unusual double burial interred within courtyard fronting western entrance of apsidal hall | No dating for this period round Monument area | |
| 5 | Early 5th century | Site reoccupied: apse of apsidal hall repaired and two buttress walls built either side of apse to support new build. Southern courtyard partially levelled over leaving only inner pool of central feature in use. Eastern cistern altered | Phase 5a: Rectangular building constructed beside Monument 1. Some industrial activity and drain added | Temple mausoleum maintained but deteriorating. Rough wall built to east of it. Alterations made to service building; portico sub-divided |
| | | | Phase 5b: Piers inserted in rectangular building, and possible second floor. Set of rooms built on northwest side of rectangular building, covering Monument 1. Possible portico added to building to southeast; drain covered by this time | |
| | | | Phase 5c: Main room divided into two. Threshold inserted into northeastern wall; building extended to northeast | |
| | | | Phase 5d: Central piers added to both main rooms giving extra support. Blocking walls built between portico piers. Further walls added to northwest creating possible store room containing large *dolium* | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | Mid–late 5th century | Abandonment possibly due to environmental changes; rising water table. Collapse of Xarra–Butrint aqueduct and lack of constant supply of fresh water may also have impacted upon use of villa | Possible abandonment due to environmental changes; rising water table | |
| 7 | Early 6th century | Site reoccupied: new religious focus to house with construction of basilica occupying eastern part of earlier house | Site reoccupied: small chapel built west of Monument 1, utilising walls of earlier buildings | Road resurfaced and new wall built along the western edge of it. Further deterioration of Temple mausoleum. Some tombs destroyed. Small-scale domestic activity within the *cella*. Alterations made to service building; small building built across former portico |
| 8 | Mid-6th century | Alterations undertaken due to instability of building as a result of changing environmental conditions | Possible small alterations, addition of walls cut through floor of chapel | |
| 9 | Late 6th century | Site abandoned. Building partially destroyed by fire | Abandonment of whole area; all deposits covering buildings are demolition layers; no further occupation or use of this area seen in archaeology | Buildings abandoned and area in decline. Rubble and silts building up across area. Silting up of the road forms a hollow-way. Rough wall on western side of hollow-way may suggest some use of area |
| 10 | 7th–early 9th century | Minimal occupation/activity | | |
| 11 | Mid-9th–mid-10th century | Site re-occupied as residence of a Byzantine official. Possible industrial role as indicated by number of kilns | | Demolition and robbing of Temple mausoleum. Arcade of aqueduct collapses due to demolition of mausoleum's eastern wall |
| 12 | Late 10th–11th century | Building abandoned and quarried for stone. Burials interred | | Thick silty clay deposits build up across the area. Small *cappuccina* burial inserted along south side of mausoleum |
| 13 | 11th–12th century | Periodic re-use: small-scale industrial activity centred on eastern apse. Devotional use centred on southern apse. Post-built structure constructed in courtyard | | |
| 14 | Late 12th–13th century | Abandoned: wall of the southern apse collapses and the site plundered for any usable stone. Dark soils build up across the site | | Abandonment of area. Silty clay deposits continue to form across area covering much of mausoleum with only southern wall remaining visible |
| 15 | 13th century | Series of burials interred within ruins. Rock pile accumulates at edge of field, dumped over ruins where land unworkable | | |
| 16 | Late 13th century onwards | Wetland conditions and virtual abandonment of area until reclamation of plain in 1960s | | |

## The excavations

From the inception of the Vrina Plain excavations an important element has been the role of the training school (Fig. 1.12). Every year from 2000 to 2012 over 30 Albanian university students were trained in modern archaeological methods and techniques by a dedicated team of supervisors, including former Albanian students who have now become professional archaeologists in their own right. Students from Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Holland, Italy, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States have also participated in the summer schools. Since 2008, new excavations on the Vrina Plain have been largely managed, administered and reported-on by young Albanian archaeologists from the Albanian Heritage Foundation, working in close partnership with Albanian national institutions, the Butrint National Park, and Albanian universities.

With excavation comes conservation. One of the biggest projects on the Vrina Plain with regards to conservation was the consolidation of the various mosaics uncovered. These were initially recorded both through careful descriptive means by John Mitchell (University of East Anglia) (Fig. 1.13) and photographically with a digital, fully rectified photogrammetric survey undertaken by Massimo Zanfini (University of Bologna) (Fig. 1.14). Initial consolidation of the mosaics was carried out by Pippa Pearce of the British Museum in 2005 and 2006. A full assessment of the condition of the mosaics was carried out in 2006 and a conservation programme implemented between 2006

*Figure 1.12. Students on the Training School being taught the techniques of archaeological recording*

*Figure 1.13. Recording the basilica mosaic descriptively*

*Figure 1.14. Recording the basilica mosaic photographically*

*Figure 1.15. Conserving the basilica mosaic*

*Figure 1.16. A lady from the village of Shën Dëlli creating an embroidery image of the bird and figs motif from the basilica mosaic*

and 2007 by Jacques Negeur and Ghaleb Abu Diab of the Israel Antiquities Authority, assisted by Agiron Islami of the Albanian Institute of Monuments.

Of the mosaics consolidated, the basilica mosaic showed the most deterioration. Fifty percent of the mosaic was damaged, while unstable foundations and fluctuating groundwater levels had resulted in slumping, cracking and detachment of *tesserae*. In order to stabilise the surface, holes (including grave cuts) were filled with layers of stone, sand and tile to provide both stability and good water permeability. These were then capped with two layers of lime mortar: one mixed with crushed ceramic and marble

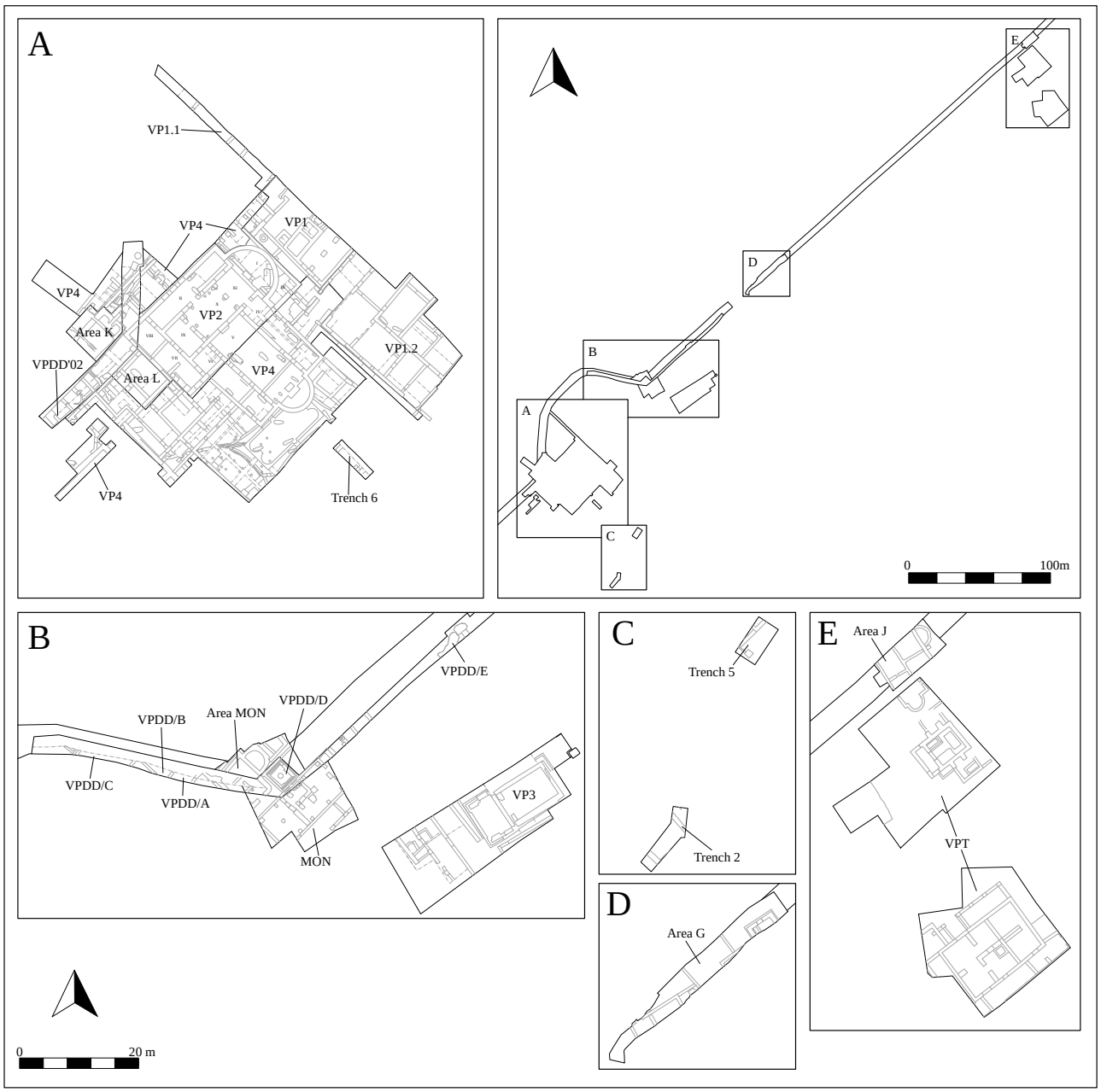


*Figure 1.17. Location plan of the area codes and trenches used during the Vrina Plain excavations 2002–08*

powder; the other with added crushed tile and limestone. The edges of the mosaic were then consolidated and loose *tesserae* replaced (Fig. 1.15). Following this, the entire mosaic was then covered by a thick layer of sand to prevent root damage.

As part of the conservation aims it had been hoped that, as with the villa at Diaporit, the Vrina Plain would be presented as a visitor attraction outside the confines of the walls of Butrint. During the course of the excavations a number of single individuals, along with larger organised walking tours, had visited the excavations. These parties had all been extremely interested in the excavations, asking many questions that the team were happy to answer and that helped these individuals leave with a new insight to the story of Butrint. Unfortunately, due to the difficulty in maintaining the upkeep of the site and problems with rising ground water it was decided to cover the excavations fully and so return the area to its pastoral aspect. As part of this programme, in the summer of 2010 the standing remains were conserved by a team of Albanian and international students who were being trained in practical conservation techniques, a new training programme organised in co-operation with the Albanian Archaeological Service Agency and the Albanian Heritage Foundation. In order that future independent travellers exploring the Vrina Plain might understand the remains, information panels have been set up detailing the excavations and the role the buildings uncovered played in a changing landscape.

*Table 1.2. Summary of excavations undertaken on the Vrina Plain 2002–2012*

| *Year* | *Site code* | *Context nos* | *Location* | *Team* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2002 | VPDD/A | 1000–1197 | Drainage ditch, southern end of eastern loop | BF members, professionals and students |
| | VPDD/B | | Drainage ditch, central part of eastern loop | |
| | VPDD/C | | Drainage ditch, northern end of eastern loop | |
| | VPDD/D | | Drainage ditch, Monument area | |
| | VPDD/E | | Drainage ditch, collapsed aqueduct pier | |
| | VPDD | | Drainage ditch, western end | |
| | VP1 | 1–71 | Trench over standing ruins exposing cistern and area to the north | Student training excavations |
| | VP1.1 | 72–80 | Northern continuation of VP1 over bath-house connecting with drainage ditch excavations | Student training excavations |
| 2003 | Area G | 2000–2268 | Drainage ditch, tomb and buildings east of aqueduct | BF members, professionals and students |
| | Area J | | Drainage ditch, bath-house at far eastern end of ditch | |
| | Area K | | Bath-house to north of western end of drainage ditch | |
| | Area L | | Series of walls and floors outside western end of apsidal room of standing remains, north of Area K | |
| | MON | 1500–1550 | Monument area | BF members, professionals and students |
| | VP1 | 100–108<br>116–121<br>124–127 | Trench over standing ruins exposing cistern and area to north | Student training excavations |
| | VP1.1 | 81–97 | Northern continuation of VP1 over bath-house | Student training excavations |
| | VP1.2 | 99<br>109–115<br>122–123<br>128–136<br>146–151 | Southern continuation of VP1 over road and rooms to south | Student training excavations |
| | VP2 | 137–145 | Eastern end of apsidal room of standing remains | Student training excavations |
| 2004 | VP1.2 | 3035<br>3047<br>3061–3066 | Road | Student training excavations |
| | VP2 | 3000<br>3003–3013<br>3032–3034<br>3036–3046<br>3048–3060<br>3067–3104<br>3106–3149 | Central area of the apsidal room of the standing remains, medieval layers removed and basilica located | Student training excavations |
| | VP3 | 3001–3002<br>3014–3031<br>3105 | Temple Mausoleum | Student training excavations |
| | MON | 4000–4044 | Monument area | BF members, professionals and students |
| 2005 | VP1.2 | 3400–3446 | Road and rooms to the south | Student training excavations |
| | VP2 | 3300–3311 | Triangular area to north of 2004 excavations | BF members, professionals and students |
| | VP3 | 5000–5039 | Temple Mausoleum | Student training excavations |
| | VP4 | 3200–3299<br>3312–3321 | Basilica and central nave | BF members, professionals and students |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2006 | VP1.2 | 3452–3609 | Rooms to south of road | Student training excavations |
| | VP3 | 5040–5084 | Temple Mausoleum | Student training excavations |
| | VP4 | 3322–3399<br>3700–3999<br>7002–7046 | Eastern and western aisles of basilica and area outside; medieval layers removed and discovery of earlier townhouse | BF members, professionals and students |
| 2007 | VP3 | 5090–5129 | Temple Mausoleum | Student training excavations |
| | VP4 | 7047–7301 | *Domus* | BF members, professionals and students |
| | Trench 2 | 7700–7741 | Southern bath-house | BF members, professionals and students |
| | Trench 5 | 7800–7834 | Southern courtyard | AHF members, professionals and students |
| | Trench 6 | 7900–7912 | Southern portico | AHF members, professionals and students |
| 2008 | VP4 | 7302–7456 | *Domus* | BF members |
| 2008 – 2012 | VPT | 1–430 | Eastern end of drainage ditch | AHF members and students |

Although the main excavations have been covered, elements of the excavations can still be seen within the Butrint National Park. As part of the Community Enterprise and Development Project that was set up in 2006 to make the local communities aware of their importance in preserving the heritage of Butrint there was encouragement to create local handicrafts that could be sold in the community-run shop within Butrint. Along with designs from the better-known monuments within Butrint, such as the Baptistery mosaic, images from the Vrina basilica mosaic, such as the bird and fig motif, the shrimps and crab, and the central motif of the birds and arch way in the sanctuary, have also been used on a range of goods for tourists to remember their Butrint experience (Fig. 1.16).

## This report

The aim of this monograph is to bring together all the results from the various seasons of work into one accessible report, including all the finds data. The initial archaeological results from the 2001–04 excavations were described in detail by Crowson and Gilkes.[31] This assessment was both a narrative and a descriptive text that details a number of the structures that will also be referred to in this volume. Where this overlap occurs the former will be acknowledged as the primary descriptive reference, with only a summary of the buildings provided in this volume. In certain cases, however, new discoveries about some of the buildings have made it necessary to write a fuller and more detailed description in the present volume. The phasing of some of the buildings has altered also from the initial assessment.

The report has been written as a narrative, phase by phase, with individual context descriptions limited to those important structural and occupational elements that make up the various phases. In the process, though, some ambiguities can occur in the interpretation of a site, especially on one such as the Vrina Plain, which has a very complex depositional as well as structural sequence. As the excavations expanded, assumptions and ideas about the site changed rapidly. What was thought initially to be a colonnaded road in 2005 turned out to be the northern portico of the 3rd-century *domus* when this area was properly excavated in the following year.[32] Consequently, the present volume has tried to present as complete a picture of the site as possible but it is inevitable that some ideas and interpretations are not going to be so clear cut as others, either due to the lack of dating or because of the limited area that was investigated.

For more information, the full archive of the excavations has been fully digitised and can be accessed online via the Integrated Archaeological Database developed and maintained by the York Archaeological Trust. The physical records of the excavations, along with the entire archive of the Butrint Foundation, is stored at Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire.

In all six main seasons of excavation were carried out on the Vrina Plain between 2002 and 2007, with a further year in 2008 restricted to a series of small trenches dug specifically to answer questions regarding the layout, date, function and morphology of a number of rooms and

areas of the townhouse (Plate 1.3). The excavations were originally begun as separate trenches with individual site codes for the various areas. Following the expansion of the excavations between 2005 and 2007, a number of these trenches became part of the large open-area excavations centred on the townhouse/basilica/*oikos* site (Fig. 1.17). These codes, included on the database, have caused some confusion and are summarised in Table 2.1. For each season new context numbers were given out, with block numbers assigned to the various areas. In all, over 2000 contexts were given out. The Butrint Training School excavations, carried out by the Albanian Heritage Foundation at the eastern end of the drainage ditch between 2008 and 2012, are also included in the table.

### *Notes*

1 Martin 2001.
2 Lane 2004, 36–46.
3 Durrell 1959, 178.
4 Pluciennik *et al.* 2004, 51–4.
5 Hounslow and Chepstow-Lusty 2004, 396–7.
6 Map Room, Royal Geographic Society, London. This image is reproduced in Lane 2004, fig. 3.7.
7 Hydrographic Office L/mf 2073/2.
8 United Kingdom Hydrological Data Centre, Taunton. This image is reproduced in Hodges 2006, 27.
9 PRO ADM 53/8464, log of HMS *Firefly* (Hydrographic Office 6641/1, A 1113/1). This image is reproduced in Lane 2004, fig. 3.6 and in Crowson and Gilkes 2007, fig. 8.2.
10 Leake 1835, 105.
11 Pouqueville 1820, 34–5.
12 For Lear's view of the Vrina Plain from Mount Sotira, see Hodges 2006, 34.
13 Durrell 1959, 178.
14 Ugolini 1927.
15 It was during these explorations upon the Vrina Plain that Ugolini purchased the so-called Nike relief from fishermen, depicting the winged Victory goddess standing in front of a cuirass. This relief probably decorated a major public building or monument within the new suburb. Hodges 2006, 107–09; Hansen 2009, 32–3.
16 Budina 1971.
17 Bescoby 2003; 2007, 95–118; Chroston and Hounslow 2004, 64–75; Hodges *et al*. 1997, 211–14; Pluciennik *et al*. 2004, 47–63.
18 Lane *et al.* 2004, 27–46.
19 Bescoby 2007, 95–6; 2011.
20 Pluciennik *et al.* 2004, 47–63.
21 Pluciennik *et al.* 2004, 54–7.
22 Chroston and Hounslow 2004, 64–75.
23 Bescoby 2007, 96.
24 Bescoby 2003; 2007, 114.
25 Crowson and Gilkes 2007, 119–64.
26 Crowson and Gilkes 2007, 131–6; Ricciardi 2007, 165–74.
27 Çondi 1988.
28 Crowson and Gilkes 2007, 126–31; Gilkes, Hysa and Çondi 2013.
29 Greenslade 2013, 123–64; Greenslade and Çondi 2011, 265–77; Greenslade *et al*. 2006, 397–408; Mitchell, Gilkes and Çondi 2005, 107–28.
30 Throughout Chapters 3 to 8 the alignment of the various buildings are discussed as being orientated N-S, E-W when in reality they are actually NW-SE, NE-SW. The reason for using the former description for the various buildings is to simplify the narrative for the reader. Where a context is aligned properly to compass point, as in the case of the Phase 11 burials, the word 'true' has been used before the orientation to indicate this.
31 Crowson and Gilkes 2007, 119–64.
32 Greenslade *et al*. 2006, 397–408; Greenslade 2013; Greenslade and Çondi 2011, 265–77.

# 2 The Roman land organisation of the Butrint hinterland

*David Bescoby*

## Introduction

The Roman landscapes surrounding Butrint seem distant to the contemporary observer, rearranged by ceaseless environmental processes and occluded by a dense overlay of modern agricultural engineering. It is only the occasional prominence of extant remains, such as the small groups of aqueduct piers or scatters of ceramic material, that remind us that the coastal floodplain which tapers southwards towards Çuka e Ajtoit once formed an inseparable component of a 'Romanised' Butrint.

Historically, the study of Roman and indeed Greek land organisation in various parts of the Mediterranean owes much to the application of aerial photography. In particular, surviving photographic archives from the Second World War have proved immensely useful, often capturing rural landscapes little changed since the medieval period.[1] At Butrint, such images have also played a role in the identification of evidence for systematic land organisation or 'centuriation', the photographs preserving many landscape features subsequently lost to programmes of post-war agricultural intensification. This early work enabled some initial theory building regarding the organisation of the suburb discovered on the Vrina Plain and the landscape that surrounded it.

In this chapter we take the opportunity to re-examine some of this early work in the light of the extensive excavations that have since taken place on the Vrina Plain. In particular, the discovery of a number of streets within the Vrina Plain settlement and further elucidation regarding the layout of the aqueduct and approach roads has allowed us to re-examine the wider organisation of the surrounding landscape.

## Background

Before considering the landscape evidence, it is worth briefly reviewing the geopolitical and economic backdrop to Roman influence at Butrint, culminating in the colonial foundation of Augustus. The region benefited from good relations with Rome during the 3rd and 2nd century BC, contributing to a period of relative economic prosperity and autonomy once under Roman control.[2] Prior to the Roman conquest, it is likely that land would have been organised on the basis of communal family ownership of small farms. The existence of these influential local families is evident from the manumission acts inscribed on the *parados* of the theatre of Butrint.[3] Post-conquest, a change in land ownership, and possibly land use, is inferred as a wealthy Roman senatorial class, the *Epirotici homines* of Cicero's correspondence, began to acquire substantial estates in the region.[4]

Archaeological evidence for several centuries of seemingly productive land use is sketchy, although the continued functioning of fortified Hellenistic sites such as Malathrea, Çuka and Dobra as rural settlements and farmsteads may provide a clue. The make-up of the agricultural economy at this time is also hard to gauge, although according to written sources, stock-rearing formed an important element.[5] Settlers who arrived through private initiative, such as Titus Pomponius Atticus who settled in 68 BC, often became known as professional stock breeders.[6] Such estates amassed huge tracts of land, turning them over to large-scale stock breeding, presumably to the detriment of more traditional forms of agriculture. Either way, cereal production is unlikely to have been as intensive as in later periods and it is interesting that Julius Caesar was unable to feed his troops from local produce during his campaign against Pompey, being forced to import grain from other provinces.[7]

With the establishment of the Caesarian colony at Butrint, and the arrival of Caius Munatius Plancus with what was probably a small number of civilian colonists, the level of disruption caused by the much-feared confiscation and redistribution of land is hard to judge.[8] The Cicero correspondence in itself does highlight the extent to which large estates fuelled by cheap slave labour had come to flourish in the region.

If this first colonial declaration largely failed to bring

about the scale of change in existing patterns of agriculture and land holding required to imprint on the archaeological record, the second decree of colonial foundation issued by Augustus sometime after 31 BC holds far greater potential. It is in the wake of these constitutional and political shifts, reflected so clearly in the built fabric of Butrint itself, that the 1st-century AD expansion onto the Vrina Plain takes place.

It is to this period of colonial impetus that the wider reorganisation of the hinterland has also been attributed, although as has been previously acknowledged, the relationship between rural and urban change is difficult to detect archaeologically, particularly within a meaningful timescale.[9] In addition to probable landscape reorganisation in terms of land allocation, the prevailing estuarine conditions are likely to have led to programmes of land-reclamation, with marginal marshy lands flanking the major waterways being actively managed and improved through drainage schemes. No extant evidence for such schemes has survived the widespread implementation of modern drainage and irrigation schemes. It has, however, become evident that settlement on the distal margins of the plain battled against a background of rising water levels, driven primarily by ongoing subsidence of the area within the local tectonic regime, reinforcing an upward trend in relative sea level. Evidence for the mitigation of an increasing propensity towards flooding, particularly following seismic episodes, is seen at several low-lying locations throughout Butrint.[10]

## The organisation of the Butrint hinterland

The initial study undertaken in 2006 sought evidence of land divisions through the analysis of a series of aerial photographs taken during an RAF sortie along the Albanian coastline in 1943. Using key angular alignments from Butrint and those of recently excavated buildings on the Vrina Plain as a reference, corresponding angular alignments were sought within the AP images using an automated computational routine.[11] A statistically significant number of alignments were detected, corresponding to hedges, tracks and other linear features. Detected linear features in the image were filtered to leave only those whose spacing was divisible by one *actus* (defined as 35.35 m – in keeping with measurements from contemporary colonial foundations). The remaining features were then used to reconstruct a grid corresponding, in theory, to the original divisions of the *agrimensores*. Results from the original study overlain onto the aerial photographs used are shown in Plate 2.1. The majority of alignments conformed to a 20×20 *actus* grid, which was taken as evidence that the centuriation most likely belonged to the Augustan era, reflecting similar schemes associated with Augustan colonies at Nicopolis, Patras and Corinth.[12] Assuming adherence to the tenants of Roman surveying, the alignment of the centuriation seems to conform to that of a major roadway, constructed either as part of the reorganisation or following a pre-existing route.[13] While no section of the ancient road has been positively identified, an alignment along the northeastern edge of the valley close to the modern road is predicted, linking the Hellenistic settlements of Çuka e Ajtoit, Malathrea and Mursia, before turning northwards at Xarra. The road then runs along the western flank of Mount Mile, with a spur connecting Kalivo and Diaporit. This hypothesised route, along with the 20×20 *actus* grid system from the original study, are shown in Figure 2.1, overlain upon a topographic reconstruction of the Roman landscape.[14]

One of the key points to establish is the degree to which this system of land organisation influenced the topography and layout of settlement on the Vrina Plain. Taking the spatial position of surviving building remains, i.e. those indicated in the large-scale geophysical surveys as well as from later excavation, a constraining influence of the centuriation scheme on the overall layout appears evident. Figure 2.2 shows the outline of known buildings in relation to the reconstructed grid. What is immediately apparent is that the axial orientation of the settlement appears to fall along the northeast–southwest division of the grid, with a string of discrete buildings following this alignment, presumably linked by a connecting roadway. We might hypothesise that the line of the original valley road was extended (from Xarra) northwestwards along the line of the grid, over the low undulating hills of Shën Dimitri – the site of an extensive Roman cemetery.

The chronology of this perceived scheme of organisation remains a key, albeit unanswered question. Late Republican evidence is scant within recent excavations, often as a result of water-logging preventing these levels from being reached. It is important, however, to attempt to establish the degree of influence such planned organisation continued to have on the evolving settlement and it is here that the sequence revealed through excavation can shed some light.

### *1st-century settlement of the Vrina Plain*

One of the more interesting discoveries made during the recent excavations on the Vrina Plain was the emergence of an intersection of three streets within the eastern portion of the main excavated area (see Chapter 3), as shown in Figure 2.3. The alignment of these streets was found to be slightly different (by *c*. 6 degrees) to that of the proposed system of centuriation described above. The buildings that abut and open onto these streets are ascribed to the second half of the 1st century AD, sometime after the initial Augustan impulse of colonial foundation. The alignments make most sense when considered in the light of the aqueduct. The southeast-aligned street, if projected southeastwards, is found to run parallel to the course of the aqueduct along 90% of its route to Xarra, as shown in Figure 2.4.[15] The potential existence of what would effectively be a new approach road from the south, running alongside the aqueduct as a spur from the pre-existing road just north of Xarra and flanked with well-appointed houses incorporating

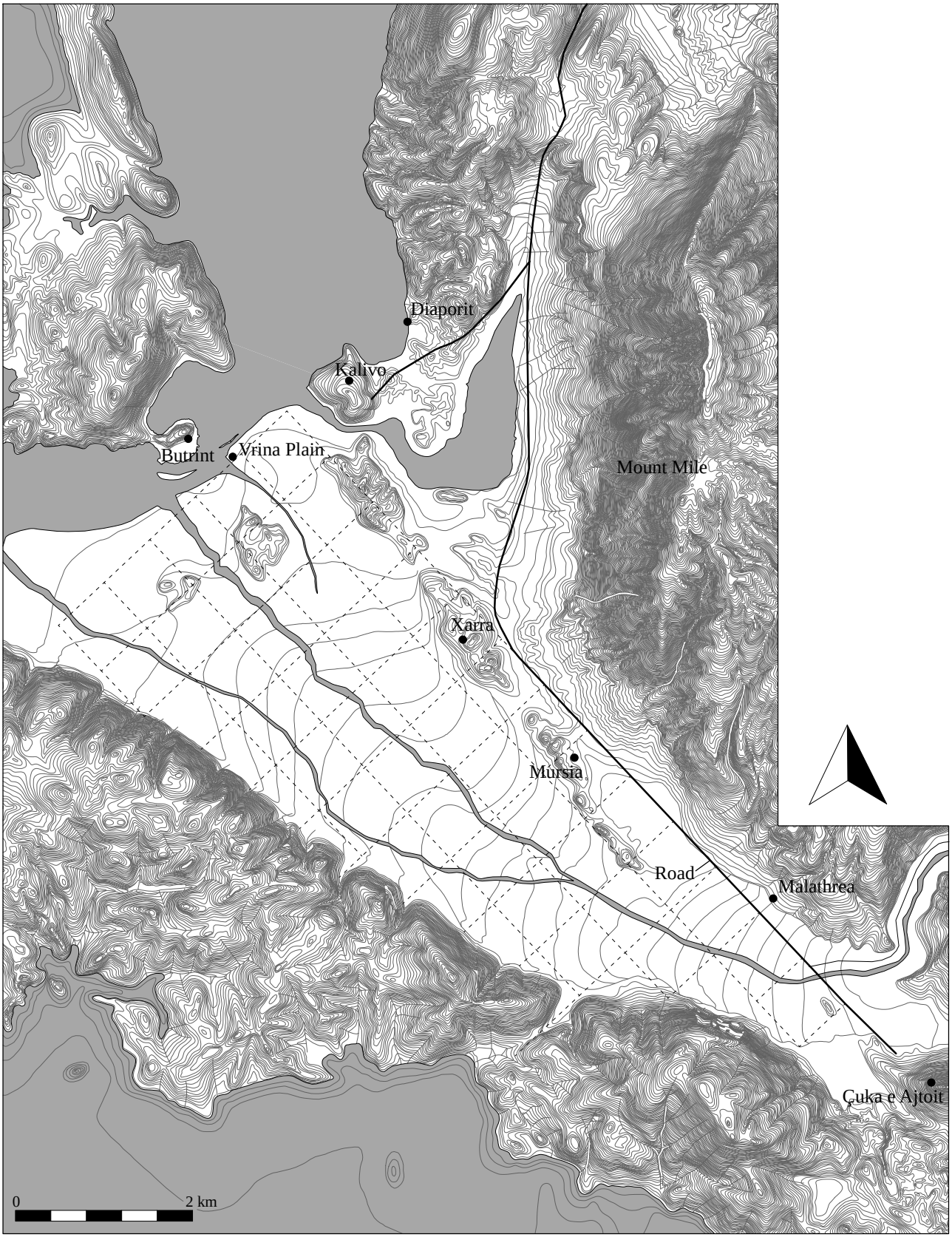


*Figure 2.1. The hypothesised route of the pre-existing road, linking a chain of known sites along the edge of the valley and 20×20* actus *scheme of land division identified in 2006*

shop frontages, might well represent the ongoing impetus of reorganisation.

If the original road onto the margins of the plain ran up through Shën-Dimitri, turning southwestwards along the coast and connecting a row of buildings, as hypothesised above, the construction of a new approach road flanking the aqueduct throws the emphasis to the southwest. As this point marks the shortest span across the Vivari Channel, it almost certainly indicates the presence of a river crossing or bridgehead. This is no doubt reflected in the dense development coalescing around this point in proceeding centuries, contrasting with the increasingly funerary nature of structures to the northeast of the aqueduct.[16] The approximate direction of a major bridge across the Vivari Channel, almost certainly dating from this time, is known from a small surviving section on the opposite bank.[17]

### *3rd-century organisation*

By the mid-3rd century, the line of buildings flanking the approach road had been replaced by a large villa. It seems probable that a new road, spurring from the approach road some 500 m to the southeast, was created and laid out to run past a large mausoleum contemporary with the extensive villa or *domus* and located 90 m to the northeast. Although only a small section of the road here was excavated (see Chapter 8, Figs 8.6 and 8.8), dating evidence, in conjunction with an increase in surface height matching that of the villa approach road, suggests it is contemporaneous with the extensive remodelling associated with the construction of the villa. Its continued path to the bridgehead is uncertain and its apparent trajectory might suggest that the bridgehead was also relocated. Interestingly, although almost certainly coincidence, this road line falls on the 20 *actus* division of the original centuration grid.

The box below provides a three-point summary of the topographic evolution of the Vrina Plain settlement in relation to wider landscape organisation during the Roman period, much of which is expanded upon in later chapters.

**Summary of the early topographic evolution of the Vrina Plain in relation to landscape organisation**

I – Augustan or (?) earlier influence detected in the form of land divisions within the valley conforming to 20×20 *actus* units aligned with the pre-existing approach road.

II – Augustan aqueduct and new approach road running alongside and aligning with channel crossing point. Alignment deviates from proposed centuriation grid. Development of settlement from mid-1st century focused along this road axis and crossing point. It is likely that the bridge dates to this era, although the bridgehead itself has not been located.

III – From the mid-3rd century a substantial villa occupies much of the original settlement and the approach road appears to have been diverted past a large mausoleum to the north-east.

### *Neighbouring settlements and landscapes – the regional picture*

Although the mountainous nature of the surrounding terrain gives a sense of separation from neighbouring valleys, we should not discount the potential influence of Butrint as an Augustan colony on adjoining areas, such as the Vagalat Valley to the east and the lowland areas surrounding the settlement of Phoenice to the north. The new 1st-century bridge and road into Butrint from the south would itself form a spur from a main route connecting a string of coastal towns with the new regional capital of Nicopolis. This coastal road may well have passed through the Vagalat valley as it made its way northwards towards the Roman port of Onchesmos (modern Saranda) and onwards to Dyrrhachium. So far, no systematic survey of the Vagalat valley has been undertaken, although its wide expanse of fertile soils and evidence of Hellenistic and Roman settlement along the valley margins suggest its agricultural value.

To the north, the Hellenistic settlement of Phoenice, located upon an elongate hill rising from the valley floor and once the capital of the Epirote League, also underwent significant urban transformation from the 1st century AD.[18] Much emphasis was placed on the lower-lying areas at the foot of the hill, where an orthogonal road scheme is proposed aligning with a major episode of land reclamation

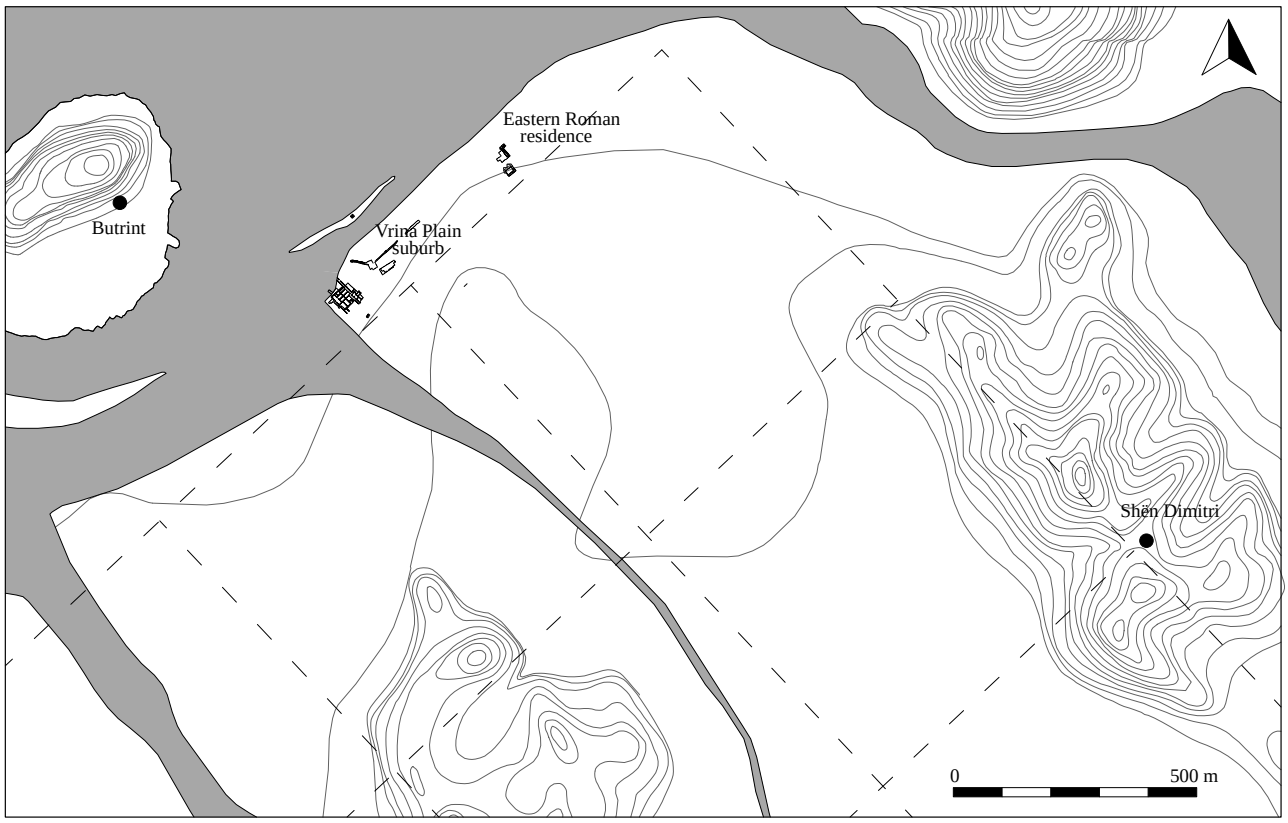


*Figure 2.2. The spatial arrangement of known building remains on the Vrina Plain, in relation to the hypothesised centuriation grid*

and division.[19] This is particularly interesting, given that it coincides with the Augustan foundation at Butrint, which may have been the catalyst for wider landscape reorganisation at this time. At Phoenice, a system of centuriation dividing allotments into 20×10 *actus* parcels is reported, extending as far south as the current northern shore of Lake Butrint. The grid seems to align with the long axis of the hill and differs by *c.* 20 degrees from that proposed for Butrint.[20] The relationship between the two settlements is unclear, although likely to rest at least in part upon the degree of seaward access via river(s) feeding Lake Butrint from the north. The Augustan aqueduct at Butrint is thought to use a submerged siphon to deliver water to the city, effectively keeping coastal access to the north open,[21] although it is not known whether the bridge across the Vivari Channel made provision for the passage of sea-going vessels. It is also possible that the river systems surrounding Phoenice had begun to silt up at this time, reducing riverine access and prompting a programme of land reclamation across newly formed marshland.

## Discussion

While it does not follow that the planned layout of settlements need necessarily correlate with wider landscape organisation, perhaps the lack of correlation suggests a more diachronous development, rather than a single unilateral event. The constitutional and political changes associated with colonial foundation might present more immediate needs for land allocation and formal division, with an emphasis upon reconstructing the civic centre of Butrint and a lag in the subsequent expansion of settlement onto the margins of the plain, driven by the proximity of a new crossing and road from the south and also the presence of the aqueduct and fresh water. In comparison with other colonial foundations within the region, the lack of a strong sense of unified reorganisation and continuum between settlement and landscape is evident. However, at Nicopolis, Augustan policy following *Actium* went far beyond the foundation of *colonia*, involving rather a process of synoecism in which large areas of the territory were reorganised – a process similar in some respects to Greek city foundations.[22] In this context, centuriation is the physical manifestation of consolidation through repetition of the Roman social and political system. Strabo paints a gloomy picture of Epirus under Augustus, describing large parts of the region as desolate and it is possible that this level of disruption/stress aided the process of land reorganisation in the hinterlands surrounding Nicopolis and Patras.

The underlying situation at Butrint, which in many ways becomes the regional counterpoint to Nicopolis, appears different in terms of both its political and economic trajectory. The expansion of Italian senatorial aristocracy

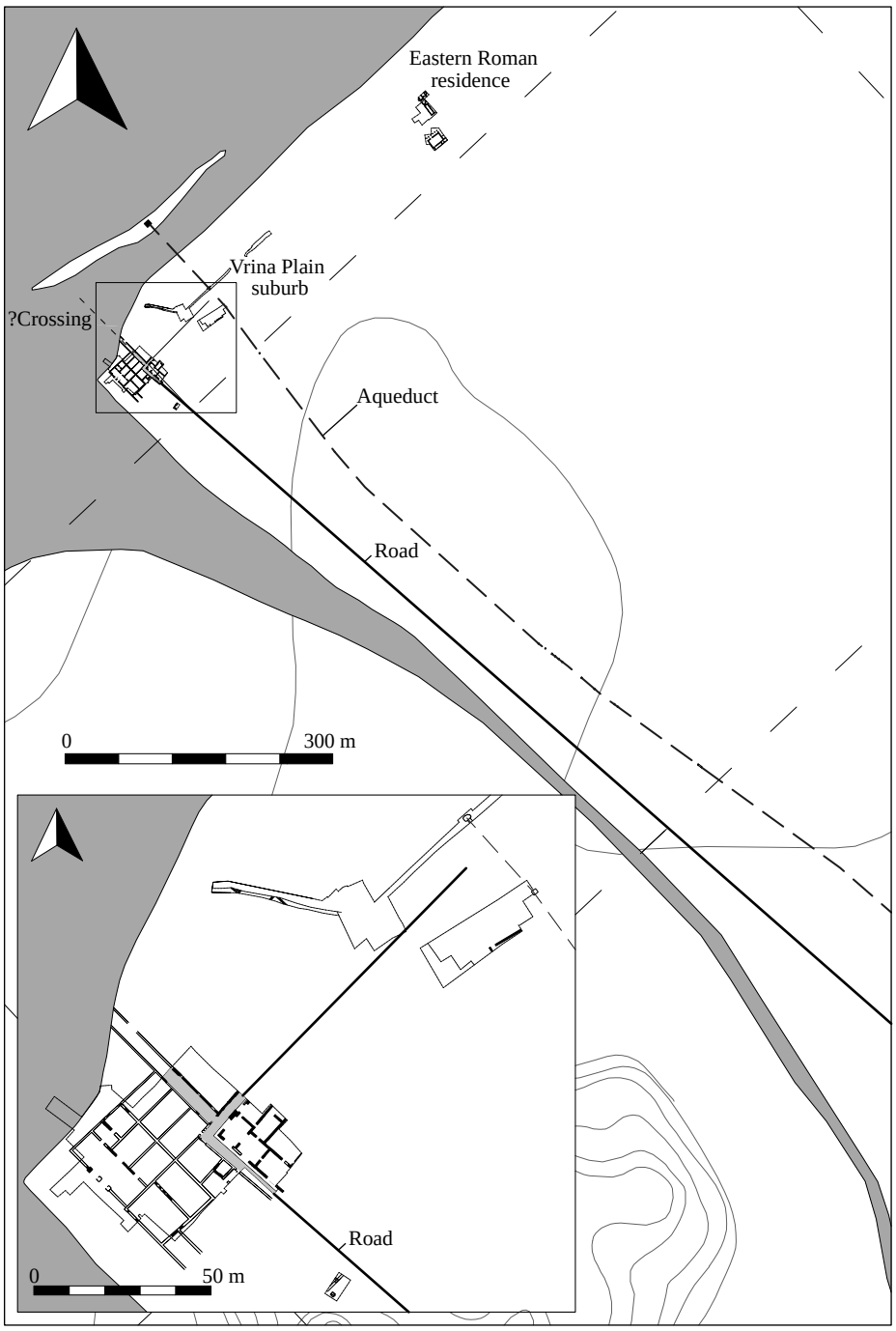


*Figure 2.3. Three intersecting streets excavated on the Vrina Plain, and hypothesised new approach road*

into the area no doubt provided a means through which Augustus consolidated his hold on this part of the province and the colonial foundation is unlikely to have interfered with the prosperity of these estates. This is perhaps reflected in the lack of expansion at Butrint during the Augustan period, with colonists being accommodated within the existing city limits.

It is also worth noting that the prime agricultural (arable) land is also situated towards the head of the valley, away from the coastal margins. Land surrounding the settlement, freshly reclaimed, would certainly be high in clay content, heavy to plough and subsequently less significant. This might be reflected in the spatial distribution of the evidence for land division shown in Plate 2.1, the majority of surviving alignments being located around Mursia where the soils were lighter and the gentle, sheltered slopes along the margins of Mount Mile could be productively terraced.

But there is no doubt that the colonial foundation marked a departure from the past; the introduction of a new constitutional format of local senate-appointed magistrates reflects the degree of political change. Over time, the decline of the political dynasties that shaped the

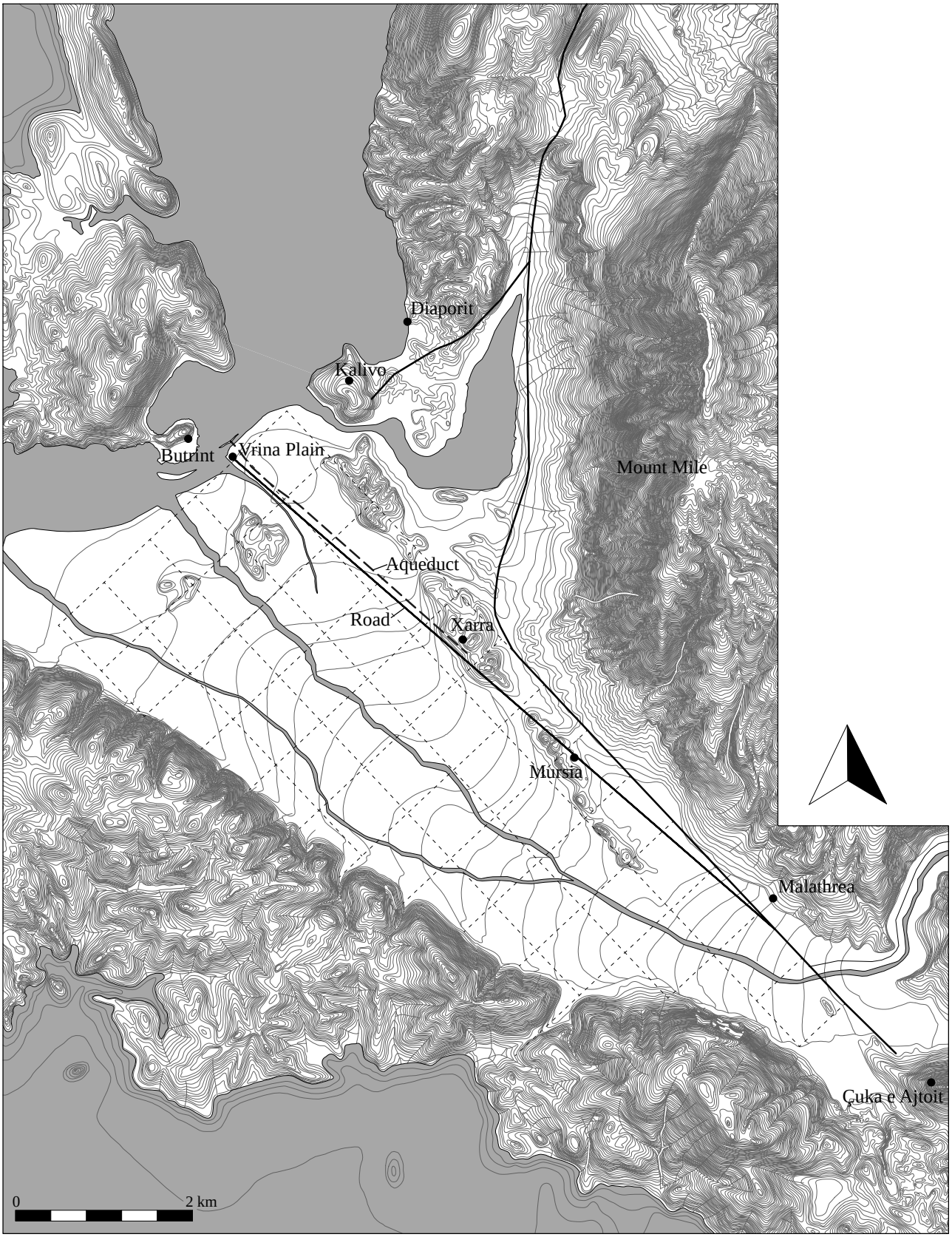


*Figure 2.4. Line of hypothetical southern approach road, running alongside the aqueduct*

late-Republican town may have allowed a new generation of entrepreneurial élites to emerge, able to take advantage of new economic opportunities. Such changes ultimately culminate in the kind of urban remodelling seen on the Vrina Plain from the mid-3rd century.

Does this infer a decline in the great estates, just as their growth signalled the decline of the pre-Roman agricultural system? A number of documentary sources attest to the continued existence of this kind of establishment into the 4th and early 5th century.[23] Alcock points to a rough correlation between continuity of site occupation and stability of land tenure, which suggests that the picture may be more piecemeal.[24] At the Malathrea villa, originally a fortified Hellenistic site on the main road between Çuka e Ajtoit and Mursia, occupation continues until the early 4th century AD, although the early Roman occupation of this site seems to have been small scale.[25] At the larger outlying villa of Diaporit, occupation ceases by the mid-3rd century. It is interesting to speculate about the possibilities of an economic shift towards arable production from the mid-1st century. While land division and allotment do not necessarily equate with intensive arable production, centuriation provides a means of agricultural intensification and the efficient production of an agricultural surplus. It seems feasible that agricultural production biased towards cereal cultivation may have contributed to the apparent period of prosperity enjoyed from this time. A system of centuriation would certainly facilitate agricultural intensification, not least in the collection of revenue.

## Conclusions

Large-scale excavations on the Vrina Plain have permitted a fresh examination and reinterpretation of the evidence for a systematic scheme of land organisation. Landscape archaeology upon the low-lying valley floor is hampered by the destruction of earlier landscape features through widespread and intensive agricultural development, forcing a reliance on past aerial photographic analysis, which appears to reveal the remnants of a systematic organisation of the landscape into 20×20 *actus* units. While there is some topographical evidence that this scheme exerted an influence on the overall layout, a number of streets revealed by excavation deviated slightly from the original alignment, perhaps reflecting a more organic evolution of the settlement. The focal point was almost certainly a new approach road running alongside the aqueduct to a crossing point over a major road bridge.

It is hard to gauge the scale and nature of the agricultural economy connected with the immediate hinterland. There is a suggestion that stock-rearing was dominant in the late-Republican period, with large tracts of land controlled by great estates. A reorganisation of the landscape into *centuriae*, with good access from the *limites,* potentially swings the focus towards a more-efficient, agrarian-based economy with the capacity to produce a surplus in the coming centuries.[26] The survival of a number of field boundary elements within AP images concentrated upon the fertile and easily irrigated area of the valley near Mursia may be evidence of this.

### *Notes*

1 A classic example being the Po valley, see Bradford 1957. See also Dyson 2003 and Pasquinucci *et al*. 1984.
2 See Hansen 2009, 45 and Cabanes 1997.
3 Bowden 2003, 73.
4 Purcell 1987.
5 See documentary sources such as Varro's *Res Rusticae* (2nd book) and also Hatzfeld, *Trafiquants*, 62–4. Epirote sheep were apparently known for their size and quality. See also Winnifrith 2002.
6 Strabo 7.7.3 C322, 7.7.6 C325 and 7.7.9 C327.
7 Caes., *B. Civ*. 4.3.11 and 12; cited by Cabanes 1997, 126. The conflict is said to have brought significant hardship to the region, unable to support two armies of this size.
8 See Deniaux 2007, 33–9; Purcell 1987, 75.
9 Bescoby *et al.* 2008; Bowden 2003.
10 See Hodges 2011b.
11 See Bescoby 2006.
12 See Doukellis 1998; Petropoulos and Rizakis 1997; Hoskins-Walbank 1997; and Romano 2003. The original study also identified a smaller, but still statistically significant, number of alignments conforming to a smaller grid made up of 12×16 *actus* squares following the same orientation. This division was less easy to assign although it could be suggested that its less-prominent survival means it pre-dates the more ubiquitous 20×20 *actus* grid, belonging to a Caesarian organisation of the landscape, or an even more ancient scheme – see Boyd and Jameson 1981.
13 See, for example, Aquileia in Duora and Roberto 2010; Dilke 1962 on Roman surveying; and Campbell 1996.
14 Here, along the northeasterly margins of the plain opposite the main settlement at Butrint, this reflects a significantly more estuarine environment, as deduced from palaeo-environmental research, along with the likely course of the river systems flowing into the valley. For a fuller description of the palaeogeography of Butrint during this period, see Bescoby 2013.
15 The aqueduct itself (which dates from the late 1st century BC) runs more or less in a straight line from Xarra. Upon entering the settlement, however, it deviates to the east to align with the centuriation grid.
16 This change in emphasis is seen in the phases of the outlying 1st-century villa currently under investigation by the Butrint Training School, which had developed into a large family mausoleum by the 3rd century.
17 See Leppard 2013.
18 De Maria and Gjongecaj 2007.
19 De Maria and Gjongecaj 2003; Giorgio 2000.
20 Giorgio 2000.
21 Wilson 2013.
22 Bowden 2003; Doukellis 1998; Purcell 1990, 15; Stein 2001.
23 See Bowden 2003, 75.
24 Alcock 1993.
25 Bowden 2003, 67.
26 See Campbell 1996.

# 3 Early Imperial period: 1st and 2nd century AD – The archaeology and growth of a suburban settlement

*Simon Greenslade*

## Introduction

This chapter describes the excavations of the earliest occupation phases encountered across the site. It will cover the period from the mid-1st century AD, when the initial settlement appears to have been laid out, and will then detail the 2nd-century expansion of the suburb up to the mid-3rd century, when the nature of the occupation changes with the construction of a large suburban townhouse.

Due to the complex nature and longevity of occupation upon the Vrina Plain site, these early phases were only discovered either in areas where it was physically possible to get below the later Roman and post-Roman buildings, such as in the courtyard of the Phase 3a *domus*, or where the earlier structures had been incorporated into later buildings. In the case of the former this allows for a detailed description of the evidence; in the case of the latter a more discursive description will be presented.

*Table 3.1. Overview of the development of the Vrina Plain settlement: Phases 1–2*

| *Phase* | *Date* | *Summary* |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Mid-1st–early 2nd century | Initial occupation: road system and number of large, well-appointed houses constructed, some incorporating shops fronting the roads |
| 2 | 2nd–early 3rd century | Development expands: large cistern and series of new houses built. Some of earlier buildings altered |

## Phase 1: mid-1st to early 2nd century AD *(Fig. 3.1, Plate 3.1)*

### *The roads*

At the eastern end of the site the intersection of three roads was discovered (Fig. 3.2). These roads were arranged in a regular, grid-like manner, with buildings set on either side. The central road was aligned east–west. The road was 2.57 m wide and its surface (149/7333/7208) was made up from a compacted gritty deposit mixed with crushed shell fragments laid over a mid-greyish-brown silt clay (7334/7207/7211) (Fig. 3.3). Ceramics dating from the early 1st century AD were recovered pressed into the surface of the road, as well as from the underlying foundation layers.

The northern edge of the road was defined by a series of seven regularly placed piers (150, 3064, 3438, 7359, 7036, 7356 and 7357) thought to have been an offshoot, *diverticulum*, of the aqueduct leading from Xarra into Butrint (Fig. 3.4). Its southern edge was formed by a 1 m wide dark-orange mortar raft (7353) which seems to have been the foundation of a pavement that potentially ran along the southern edge of the road, directly up against the façade of a contemporary building (Building 4; see Fig. 3.3). A pavement would have been necessary along this side of the road as it appears, due to the positioning and width of a number of doorways along the northern façade of Building 4, that shops were originally located here.

The road was traced from the eastern trench edge to the west for *c*. 16.30 m, at which point it turned to the south and ran along the western edge of Building 4, where further wide doorways indicate that shops would also have fronted onto this road. Only a small part of the western edge of this road surface was revealed (7339), although it must be assumed that the possible pavement seen along the northern side of Building 4 (7353) would have continued along the eastern side of the road to provide access to the eastern shops. The western edge of this road was defined by a north–south-aligned wall (7360), the northern end of which was built up against the side of the westernmost pier of the aqueduct offshoot (7357). At this end of the wall a doorway (1.96 m wide) was situated roughly central to

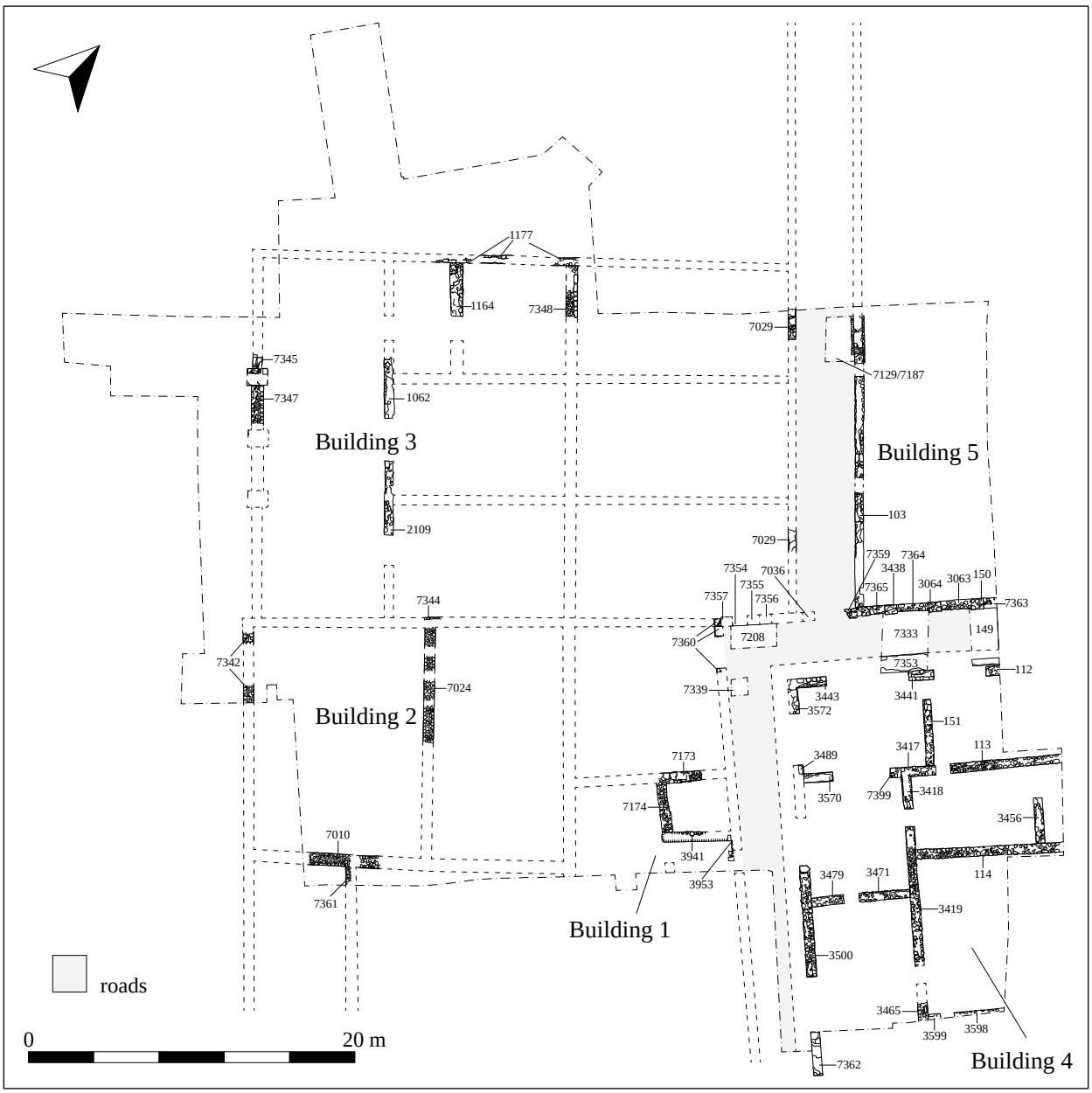


*Figure 3.1. The Vrina Plain settlement showing areas of activity in Phase 1 (mid-1st to early 2nd century)*

the east–west road that would have allowed access to the buildings beyond (Buildings 1 and 2) (Fig. 3.5).[1]

To the east of this junction a third road (7129/7187), aligned north–south and similarly fronted by various buildings, was located. Wall 7029 defined the western side of the road with wall 103 forming the eastern edge (Fig. 3.6). No evidence of a pavement was found along this road, implying no doorways fronted onto it. At the southern end of the road the piers 7036 and 7359 of the aqueduct offshoot partially encroached on to it, restricting access slightly, the space between these piers being only 1.85 m. This road seems to have provided access to the Vivari Channel and possibly a crossing point located here.[2]

### *The buildings*

Across the site various elements of several buildings have been located. To distinguish them they have been numbered 1 to 5 (see Fig. 3.1). These buildings can be grouped into three areas, with Buildings 1–3 located along the western side of the site, Building 4 at the southeast corner and Building 5 at the northeast corner. It would seem that the western buildings were divided into two separate plots by an east–west-aligned wall (7344), with Buildings 1 and 2 situated in the southern plot and Building 3 in the northern plot. Wall 7344 had largely been levelled prior to the construction of the 3rd-century *domus*, yet the eastern end of this wall is thought to have abutted the northern side of the doorway that fronted onto the main east–west roadway of the suburb.

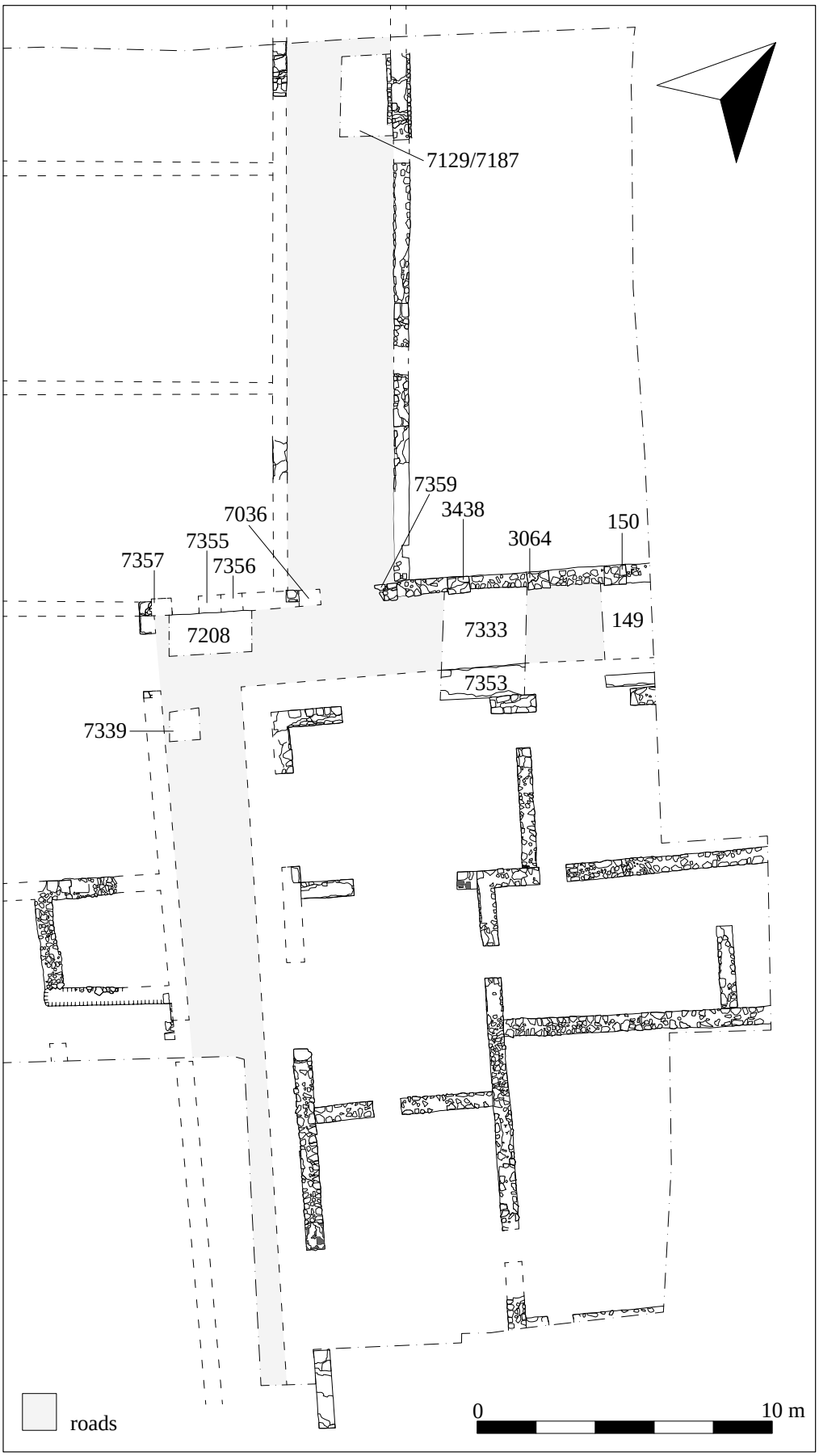


*Figure 3.2. Plan of the eastern roads of the suburb and the surrounding buildings*


*Figure 3.3. View looking west along the central road, showing the surface 149/7333, the piers of the* diverticulum *and the mortar raft 7353 (1 m scale)*

*The Western Buildings: the southern plot*

Building 1

This structure was located along the eastern edge of the plot. Due to the low water table at the time of digging it was possible to record a full stratified sequence for the building, including deposits that predated its construction.

The earliest deposit encountered was a light-grey coarse sandy gravel (7171), roughly 1.80 m below the present ground surface (Fig. 3.7). This deposit covered an area approximately 2.50 × 1.30 m and appears to be a layer of re-deposited natural gravels.

Overlying this was a light-grey silt (7170) 0.07 m thick, containing a large amount of crushed shell mixed through it. The eastern edge of this layer was truncated by a north–south linear cut (7180) (0.55 m wide by 0.10 m deep), the profile of which had steep sides and a flat base suggesting it may have been a beam slot. The cut was traced for *c*. 1.30 m, although its full extent is unclear as to the north it was truncated by the southern wall of the later 6th-century basilica (3275), while to the south it was truncated by wall 7174.[3] The limited extent exposed of this cut makes interpretation difficult; however, it is tempting to speculate that it may be associated with the first attempts at colonising the Vrina Plain, the slot possibly representing part of the foundation for a wall of a small farmhouse built by the first settlers who established themselves on the plain in

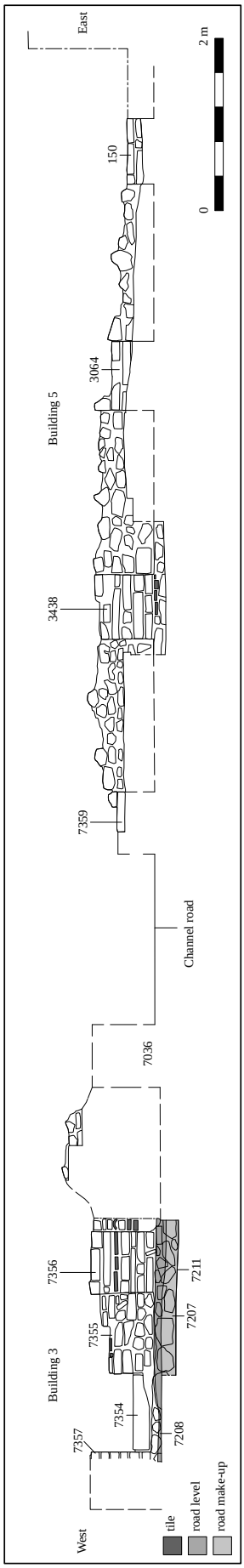


*Figure 3.4. South-facing elevation of the piers of the* diverticulum *and the blocking walls between them*

*Figure 3.5. The doorway at the northern end of wall 7360 with the later Phase 7 wall 3299 over the top of it (1 m scale)*

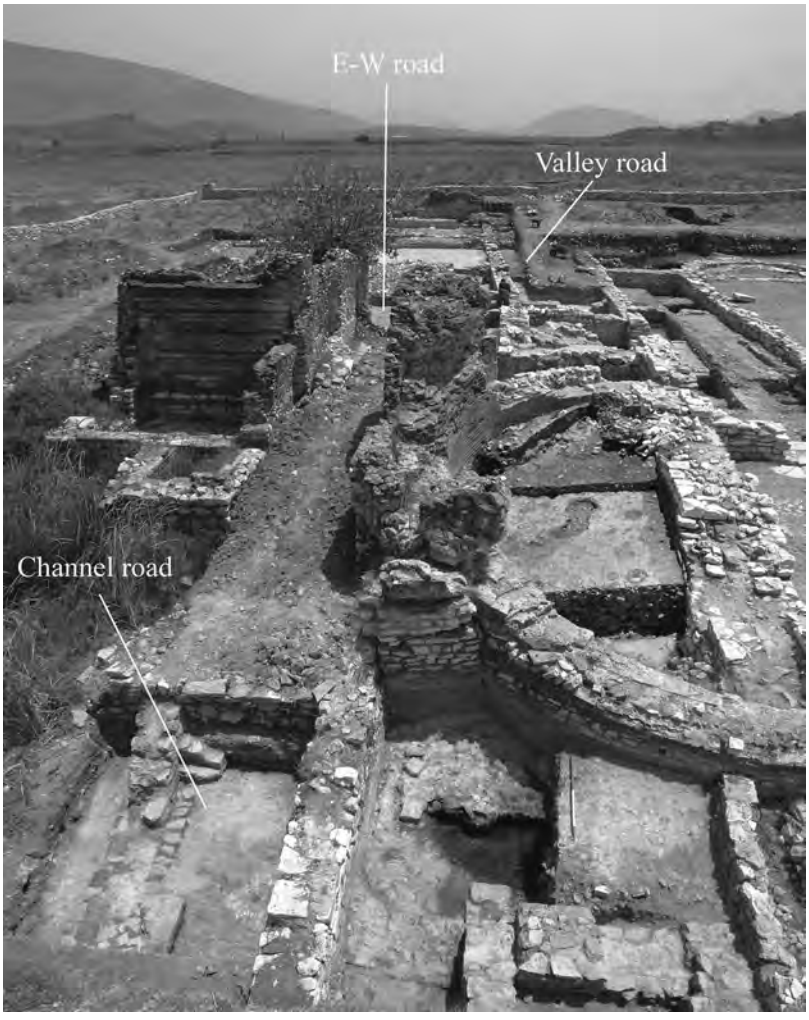


*Figure 3.6. View looking down the valley showing the position of the three roads*

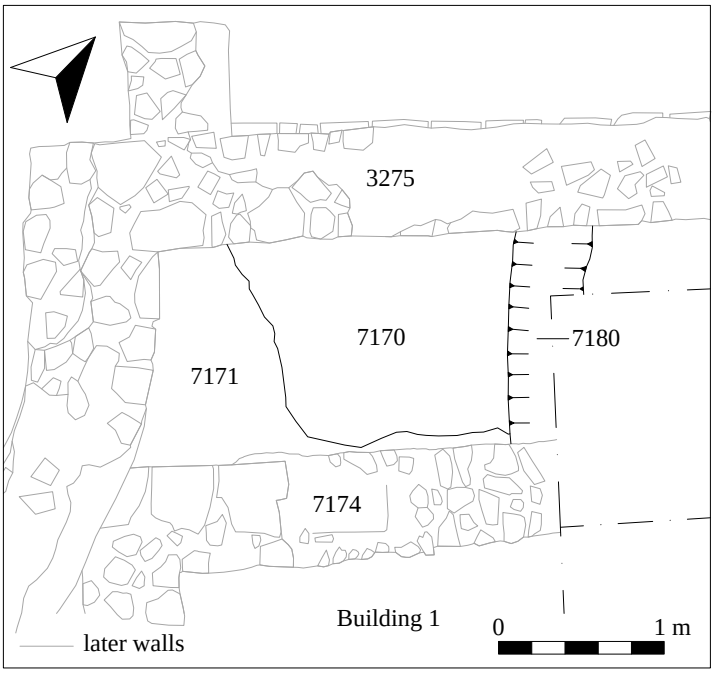


*Figure 3.7. Detail of the features pre-dating Building 1*

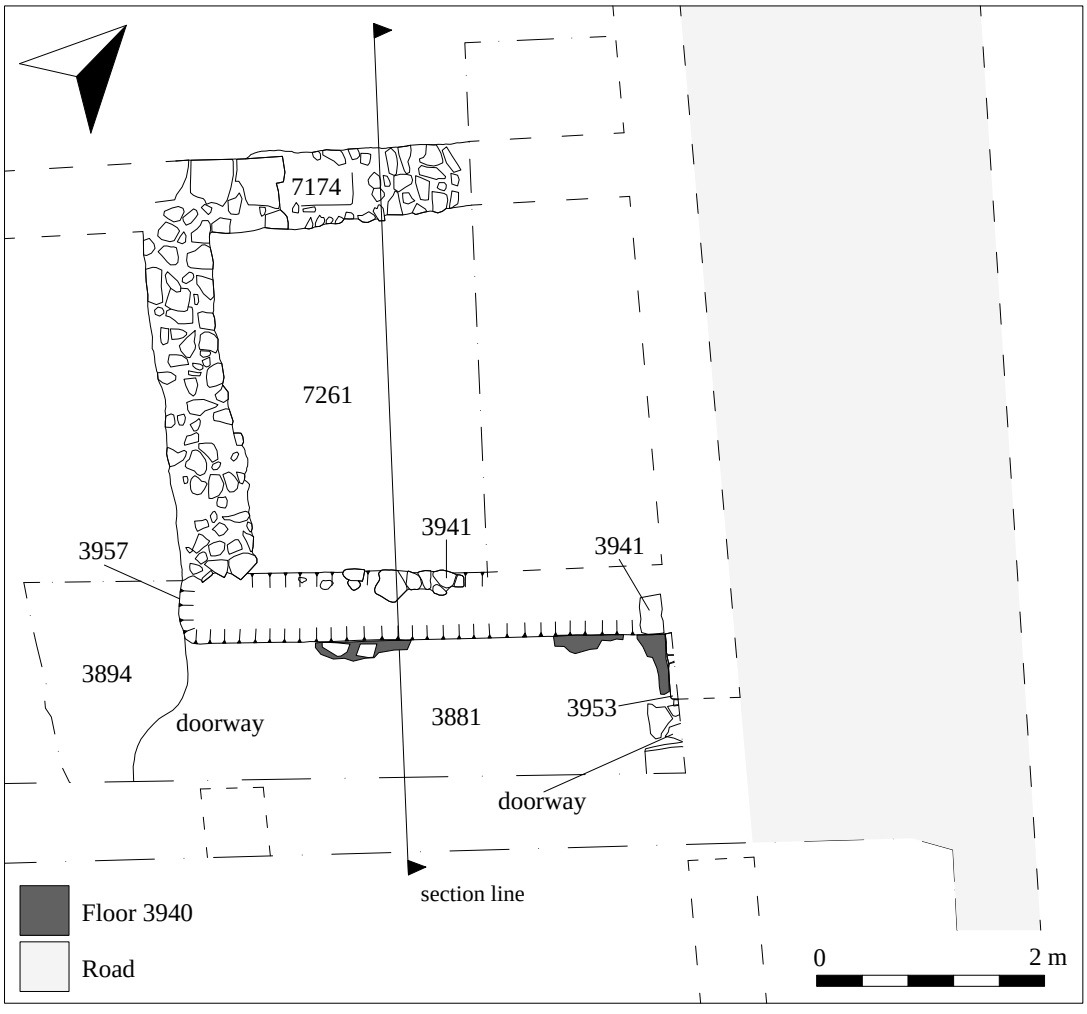


*Figure 3.8. Plan of Building 1, with location of section shown in Fig 3.12*

*Figure 3.9. Building 1, looking north (1 m and 2 m scales). The earlier features pre-dating Building 1 shown in Figure 3.7 can be seen beyond the northern wall of Building 1*

this period. Infilling the cut was a mid-greyish-green mixed silty sand/clay (7179). Ceramics dating from the mid-1st century AD were recovered from this deposit, including a fragment of an Italian *sigillata* (ITS) dish with an appliqué of the bearded god Selenus wearing a petasus hat.[4]

Following the infilling of cut 7180, Building 1 was constructed (Fig. 3.8). Parts of at least three rooms were revealed, despite the limited area of excavation due to the later constructions covering them. The northern room was defined by wall 7174, a right-angled wall measuring 3.05 m north–south by 2.35 m east–west. Built in to a construction cut (7285) and subsequently backfilled with a light-grey coarse sand (7286), the walls, which today survive only at foundation level, were constructed with limestone fragments bonded with a mixed pale-yellow mortar (Fig. 3.9). At the western end of the east–west wall, three large cut limestone blocks (0.40 × 0.42 × 0.18 m in size) survived along the wall's northern face. To the east of these blocks the wall had been robbed to a lower level (cut 7173), but despite this impressions in the surviving mortar foundations indicate that other, similarly cut stones had been placed along this northern face to form the main façade of the building.

The southern wall of the room was indicated by wall 3941. Although much of this wall had been removed by robber trench 3934, some surviving fragments of the wall were found along the northern side of the cut as well as at the eastern end of it, where a single block was located below the later Phase 3a wall 3850. As with the northern and western walls of this building, wall 3941 had been built in a construction cut (3957), the later robber trench having directly followed the line of it.

Internally the room measured 3.18 × 3.32 m. One of the earliest deposits encountered within it was a light-grey coarse sand (7282) (0.12 m thick), situated in the western corner of the room. Covering an area 1.70 × 0.85 m, this layer seems to represent up-cast dug out from the construction cut of the building and subsequently spread