

## Chapter 13

### Postscript

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Most of all it is the sea that delineates precisely the layout of the land, creating gulfs, sea-basins, traversable narrows and, in the same way, isthmuses, peninsulas and capes; in this the rivers and mountains also play their part.

Strabo, *Geography* 2.5.17

Luigi Maria Ugolini's photographs from his 1925 and later visits to the archaeological sites of southern Albania plainly show the archaeological incentives for working in a region that was, at that time, a particularly dangerous part of Europe. The Balkan wars, marked by fearful brutality, had ended little more than a decade before, giving birth to Albania at the 1913 conference in London. Yet Greece contested the loss of Epirus and continued to do so until the meeting of the Boundary Commission in Florence in January 1925. Moreover, this was not simply a diplomatic discord: in August 1923, three years before Ugolini's visit, several of the Boundary Commissioners – including its leader, General Tellini – were murdered close by at Kakavia.<sup>1</sup> The incident, eclipsed by the awesome misery induced by Greece's ill-conceived invasion of Turkey in 1921-22, led to Italy bombing Corfu as it sought reparations. Southern Albania was quintessentially a dangerous borderland and remained so until very recently. Ugolini, in short, had a pressing objective. Here, occupying the prominent hills at the entrance to one of the major routes into the Balkan interior, lay three major archaeological sites: in terms of prominence these were respectively Çuka e Aitoit, Kalivo and Butrint. Twenty kilometres to the north, in addition, lay a fourth,

Phoenicê. Ugolini's dangerous trip was prompted by the curiously coincidental surveys by Leon Rey, and inspired by those of François Pouqueville and William Martin Leake made in 1805, as detailed in Chapter 1. Each diplomat, assigned by their Great Power to monitor the irascible Ali Pasha of Tepelenë, assiduously left their readers in no doubt of the rich archaeological promise of Butrint and its hinterland. Each, like many later 19th century travellers, gave a dark impression of isolation. A century later, Ugolini himself provided a picturesque sense not only of the empty landscape but of its few peoples. The island of Corfu might have been close, and by the 1930s a point of departure for Albania for middle-class British ex-patriots like the Durrells, but for the shepherds and villagers of this region, like the similarly isolated parts of north-west Epirus, it lay as far as might be imagined from the mildly cosmopolitan community of Corfu.<sup>2</sup> This isolation, however, neither misled Ugolini nor should it mislead us. Southern Albania, once it became Ottoman, became a frontier; before this, since Palaeolithic times, the Ionian Islands and Balkan littoral lay at the centre of the Mediterranean. These three sites, therefore, looked to the sea, and perhaps to Corfu as an axiomatic point, and served intermittently as portals on an exacting but accessible route through the Balkans.

Luigi Maria Ugolini's sense of time and place means that his unpublished records of the Italian Mission's work on Kalivo and Çuka e Aitoit possess a lasting importance. These two sites lay within the hinterland of Butrint – ancient *Buthrotum*, the Greco-Roman town that thanks to Ugolini's excavations gained an international status – and each merits the

scrupulous investigation that Butrint has received. Being relatively difficult to reach, Ugolini's work was limited. In his wake the Albanian-Soviet mission of the late 1950s made significant but small-scale excavations that largely served the fervently nationalist need to reify the continuing isolation of these places. So as Nikita Khrushchev negotiated to build a submarine base in Lake Butrint close to Kalivo, his archaeologists were pliantly sustaining the myth of an Illyrian origin for these sites, which would distinguish them from Greek fortified centres a few kilometres over the border to the south.<sup>3</sup> The recent small-scale interventions by the Butrint Foundation were intended to give a modern dimension to Ugolini's unfinished work. These interventions serve simply to confirm the fascinating complexity of these two places.

Kalivo was known to the Venetians as Monte Stin Petra.<sup>4</sup> Venetian cartographers emphasize its bold contours in contrast to, say, Butrint, which was then in economic decline, being little more than a collection of fish houses. Çuka e Aitoit, on the other hand, just outside the 18th-century Venetian enclave, evaded the mapmakers' attention. The British cartographers of the 19th century omitted to name either hill. Ugolini, we might well imagine from his avid assembling of archives and publications, was well armed with Venetian sources when he set out to quiz local farmers and shepherds who guided him to these sites. The imposing walls of Kalivo in their immensity resembled the fortifications at Phoenicê. The prehistoric aspect of the walls at Kalivo and the seeming absence of later fortifications led Ugolini to ponder – as most scholars have since – whether this was the precursor of Butrint. Indeed, as Ugolini's own notes (Chapter 2) make clear, he wondered if Kalivo could be the site associated with the Trojan history postulated in the conflicting ancient sources. Neither Ugolini's investigations nor those by the Butrint Foundation have conclusively resolved this one way or the other (cf. Chapter 5). In fact, for what it is worth, the typology of the Kalivo fortifications appears similar to Hellenistic walls on Kephallonia.<sup>5</sup> Yet, later Bronze

Age, as well as Hellenistic and Roman, stratified and surface finds serve to leave this question in doubt. Only radio-carbon dates will resolve the matter. What is now clear, however, is that the summit was occupied by a Hellenistic structure, most probably a shrine or temple, which significantly would have overlooked the great sanctuary of Asclepius at Butrint. Visitors coming from Corfu by boat would have noted this as a prominent landmark in the ring of hills surrounding the marshes. No less significantly, the sanctuary would have been clearly visible from Phoenicê, the then Chaonian capital.

The characteristic shape and visual presence of Çuka e Aitoit would have been even more prominent to the visitors coming up the channel to Butrint, or in the sanctuary of Asclepius, or indeed on Kalivo. This angular hill is seldom ever lost to sight in a rainstorm or in the mid summer haze; indeed, on a clear day the so-called palace structure at its summit is visible as far as from Butrint. Stationed above the point where the valley might be readily cultivated, it surely exploited its context – close to the medicinal sanctuaries, overlooking marsh and valley terrain, and on the gentle approach to the inner valleys. The imposing Hellenistic 'palace' complex at Çuka e Aitoit may well have been the precursor of the 3rd century BC Hellenistic villa on the lower hillside opposite at Malathrea.<sup>6</sup> And, in turn, after Malathrea had been reoccupied in the mid- to later Roman period, it was to Çuka e Aitoit that its community turned to seek some kind of defensive refuge once open valley settlements were considered either insecure or inappropriate for the changing social conditions of the 6th to 7th centuries.<sup>7</sup>

Ugolini's archives for both sites must be seen in the context of his extraordinary activity at first Phoenicê then Butrint. At both he began by understanding the main features of the topography: the walls etched across imposing landscapes. However, at Phoenicê and Butrint he then set out to understand the principal monuments within their topographies, working on a scale unimaginable in modern times. The logistical difficulties of replicating this

strategy at Çuka e Aitoit and Kalivo may well have retarded his intentions. If, indeed, he did wish to follow up his mapping programme and small-scale interventions, one wonders where exactly he might have excavated. Mindful of Schliemann's excavations at Troy, and the then British campaigns at Mycenae, it is pure speculation, but we might suggest that it was to pin down the Virgilian myth of Aeneas visiting *Buthrotum* to a fixed point that drove him to such audacious surveying.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, firmly in his mind, like those of his contemporaries excavating in Greece, was a sense of a Mediterranean that looked to its seaways and, as Strabo tellingly notes, the routes that connected them. Ugolini's vision was shaped by his financial support from Mussolini's government, and was underpinned by a restless, not to say audacious, intellectual curiosity to see this constellation of sites as metaphors of a Greco-Roman world that knew few bounds. For these reasons, the notes and drawings of Luigi Ugolini have an enduring importance, just as the notes from the Albanian-Soviet mission reveal an extraordinary episode explicitly designed to treat the past in an alternative way, connected in background but with opposing aims and vision.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Barras 1965. Tellini was killed on 27 August 1923; Corfu was bombed on 31st.

<sup>2</sup> See Gage 1997: 40-42.

<sup>3</sup> Khrushchev's suggestion that Lake Butrint would make an ideal submarine base – and the rejection of this – was published by Enver Hoxha to signal the importance of archaeology for the regime; the story is cited by J. Halliday (1986: 220). For details of the Albanian-Soviet Archaeological Mission, see Chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup> AA.VV 1998: 54-55; the name transliterates most closely as 'stony/rocky'.

<sup>5</sup> Randsborg 2002: 216-221 (in particular, type 8).

<sup>6</sup> Condi 1984.

<sup>7</sup> Bowden 2003: 180-183; Bowden and Hodges 2004: 215-217.

<sup>8</sup> However, see also Gilkes 2003: 3-21 for an assessment of the methodology and 'holistic' archaeological approach by Ugolini.

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