

Buthrotum/Bouthrotos (Butrint, Albania)

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On the coast of EPIRUS, Buthrotum/Bouthrotos was an ancient port city, located opposite the island of CORCYRA. Naturally oriented toward the sea, Buthrotum occupied a headland on a short navigable water channel (Vivari), which joined an inland lagoon (Lake Butrint) to the Ionian Sea (Hodges 2006). The importance of the sea to the ancient Roman inhabitants of Buthrotum is illustrated by the city's necropolis. Monumental tombs built on both banks of the water channel faced the seafarers who approached the city's "muddy" harbor (Strabo 7.7.5). Buthrotum is described in VERGIL'S *Aeneid* as a "little Troy" (*parva Troia*), founded by Helenus, son of King Priam (Verg. *Aen.* 3.289–505). Hecataeus of Miletos classified Bouthrotos as a *polis* around 500 BCE (Steph. Byz. Frag. 106), but Corcyra may have claimed it as a mainland possession (*peraia*) by the time of the Archidamian War (Thuc. 3.85).

A settlement or sanctuary existed on the Acropolis by the seventh century BCE, judging from imported Corinthian pottery recovered at the site. Having launched excavations at Butrint in 1928, L. M. Ugolini unearthed the theater and the Sanctuary of Asklepios (see ASKLEPIOS). To date, 219 Greek inscriptions have been discovered at Butrint; most are manumission decrees dating to the second century BCE. Excavations in the Roman Forum have demonstrated that the second century BCE represented a major phase of urbanism, entailing the construction of the theater and buildings defining the Sanctuary of Asklepios and the AGORA (Hernandez and Çondi 2008).

As a port of call along the important trade route linking Italy and the East via the Straights of Otranto, Buthrotum had a geostrategic and commercial significance in the western Balkans. During Rome's civil war, JULIUS CAESAR stationed one legion at Buthrotum and later established a plan to colonize the city (Caes. *B Civ* 3.16; Cic. *Att.* 16.16). With the help of CICERO, T. POMPONIUS ATTICUS vigorously resisted the colonization program. Atticus

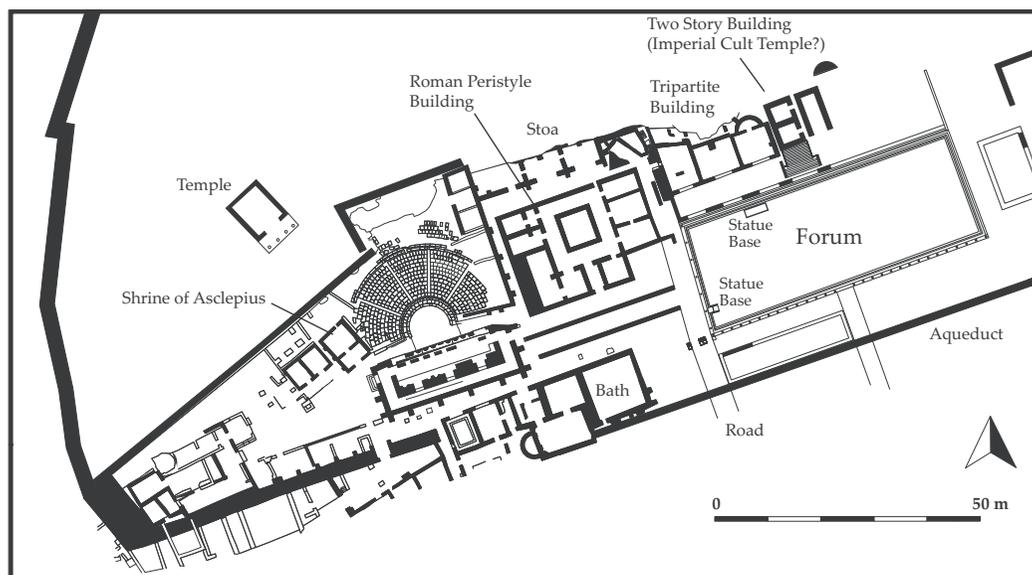


Figure 1 Plan of Butrint's urban center. Courtesy of David R. Hernandez.

owned an estate at Buthrotum, from which he received substantial income (Nep. *Att.* 14). Buthrotum was colonized in July 44 BCE predominantly by settlers who came from the urban poor of Rome. Just like the contemporary colonies at CORINTH and CARTHAGE, the colonization of Buthrotum was intended to relieve population pressure at Rome and stimulate trade with the eastern Mediterranean (see COLONIES, ROMAN EMPIRE (WEST)).

An aqueduct and paved FORUM were constructed in the Augustan period. In imperial times, baths, fountains, and public buildings were constructed by civic benefaction. In the second century CE, an elite woman, Junia Rufina, adorned in marble a spring dedicated to nymphs (Hodges, Bowden, and Lako 2004). Major changes came to the city in the fourth century, when the classical urban center was permanently destroyed, owing to an earthquake. Large-scale construction projects in the fifth and sixth centuries created the Triconch Palace, the Great Basilica, and the

Baptistry, whose stunning mosaic floor survives. Butrint's hinterland includes a large Roman villa at Diaporit and a Roman suburb on the Vrina plain (Hansen and Hodges 2007). The latter was subsequently transformed in Late Antiquity into a complex with a central Christian Basilica.

SEE ALSO: Baptisteries; Manumission, Greek and Roman; *Polis*; Villa.

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