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REVIEW ARTICLES AND LONG REVIEWS,  
AN INVENTORY OF MASS GRAVES IN LATE ANTIQUITY,  
OBITUARIES, AND BOOKS RECEIVED

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(to accompany an article in *JRA* 28 [2015])

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# The decorative architecture of Hellenistic and Roman Epirus

David R. Hernandez

MARCO PODINI, *LA DECORAZIONE ARCHITETTONICA DI ETÀ ELLENISTICA E ROMANA NELL'EPIRO DEL NORD* (DISCI Dipartimento storia culture civiltà, Sezione Archeologia; Bononia University Press, Bologna 2014). Pp. xv + 270 including 43 tavole at the end, 60 figs. in text including colour. ISSN 2284-3523; ISBN 978-88-7395-991-5. EUR 35.

This is a valuable contribution to the long-neglected study of Hellenistic and Roman architecture in Epirus (Epeiros). The book, which follows from a dissertation and post-doctoral research at the University of Bologna, presents the results of fieldwork conducted since 2000 in N Epirus and S Illyria, with an emphasis on the ancient tribal territory of Chaonia. This is the second regional study of S Albania published by the team of the Italian Archaeological Mission at Phoinike, a project jointly directed by S. De Maria (University of Bologna) and S. Gjongecaj (Albanian Institute of Archaeology),<sup>1</sup> both of whom, in separate prefaces, highlight the book's methodological and heuristic importance; De Maria's short piece also usefully offers a concise description of Epirote urbanism. The book is meticulously researched, well written and organized (which compensates to a degree for the lack of an index), and cogently argued. Its main purpose is to examine the decorative fragments of architecture with respect to typology, chronology, provenience, use, and historical development (here "architectonic decoration" does not include a study of architectural sculpture or relief). The key chapter sections, "Gli ordini architettonici" (II.B) and "Gli elementi architettonici in rapporto al contesto storico" (II.C), draw their analyses and conclusions from a detailed catalogue of capitals, columns, bases, architraves, friezes and pilasters from N Epirus and S Illyria. One of M. Podini's objectives is to provide a "strumento di lavoro", and the book certainly lives up to this goal. It is presently the only comprehensive and detailed study of Epirote architecture capable of providing a sound identification of and context for the innumerable architectural fragments that have been noted for more than a century by archaeologists and travelers. The book's utility is equally applicable to the best-researched sites in Epirus and S Illyria, including Antigonea, Apollonia, Butrint (*Buthrotum*), Dodona, Dyrrachium (*Epidamnus*), Gitani, Nikopolis, Oricum and Phoinike, where detailed architectural studies are lacking. The book distinguishes the regional characteristics of Epirote architecture while also rectifying erroneous information (especially with respect to architectural chronology). Yet it resists the temptation to define a "regional style" here since the origin and development of architectural decoration were not the result of an indigenous manifestation, but rather emerged under external Hellenic influences through a synergy of cultural interactions between a core region (the Peloponnese) and peripheral zones (Epirus, Illyria, Macedonia, Magna Graecia). Nonetheless, the author does identify some strong cultural preferences and innovations that characterize "elements" of a regional style. Grappling with difficult questions of core-periphery interactions in the central Mediterranean area, Podini's study is more expansive than a localized investigation of Chaonia, for it explores the rôle of Epirus in the spread of Hellenic architecture in the regions of Illyria, Macedonia and Magna Graecia.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I ("Inquadramento topografico, storico-economico e urbanistico"; 1-40) provides a historical and topographical background of the region of Chaonia and discusses urbanism and trade in Epirus. Part II ("Architettura, contesti e materiali"; 43-131) is subdivided into three sections. The first ("I contesti architettonici"; 43-89), a survey of the sites and architectural monuments of N Epirus and S Illyria, provides further background information allowing the reader to situate in time and space the evidence presented in the catalogue. The heart of the study is laid out in two sections within the same chapter.

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1 In *Il territorio di Phoinike in Caonia: archeologia del paesaggio in Albania meridionale* (Bologna 2012), E. Giorgi and J. Bogdani provide a survey of the archaeological sites of S Albania.

In “Gli ordini architettonici” (91-116), Podini describes the orders of architecture in Epirus: the polygonal-octagonal, Doric, Ionic and Corinthian orders and their subtypes. Then in “Gli elementi architettonici in rapporto al contesto storico” (117-31) he traces the development of Epirote architecture according to chronological phases, from the early Hellenistic (late 4th c. B.C.) to the High Roman Empire (3rd c. A.D.). Only the last two concluding paragraphs are devoted to late antiquity. Part III is a catalogue with 165 entries. Each begins with a description (architectural element, provenience, measurements, material type, condition), followed by a short discussion to contextualize and date the piece. Each entry is illustrated in plates by a photograph and, in a number of cases, by a scaled profile drawing. Copious and detailed references are included in the short descriptions, demonstrating the exceptional attention afforded to each architectural element.

In the body of the book (Parts I and II), the majority of illustrations (43) are reproductions of ones from other sources; this includes all the scaled drawings. Podini’s own illustrations are good photographs of landscape in color (4) and architecture (13) taken in the field. Plates 1-9 are his original profile drawings of pieces in the catalogue. Plates 10-43 display 6 photographs of fragments per plate (204 photographs in total). The quality of the images varies: the majority are clear and illustrative, but a few are moderately blurry (10.c; 29.e), while others are quite unclear (11.b; 25.f) or taken under poor conditions (13.c; 23.b; 27.a; 28.f; 29.d; 34.b).

The major conclusions (199-208) will be discussed under the following 4 headings:

1. *Epirote identity and “provincial architectural style”*

Podini examines what he describes as the “cultural-matrix problem”, essentially the question of whether the Epirotes were Greek. He concludes that they meet Herodotus’s (8.144) criteria for Greek ethnicity with respect to kinship, language, religion and “way of life”. He weighs these attributes against the statements of Thucydides (2.80) and Strabo (7.7.1), who called the Epirotes “barbarians”. Podini claims (199 n.1) that Plutarch (*Phoc.* 29) and Ps.-Skylax (28-33) included Epirus in the Greek world, but that was not the case with Ps.-Skylax.<sup>2</sup> Writing in the third quarter of the 4th c. B.C., that author stated that Hellas began after Epirus in Akarnania, thereby explicitly excluding Epirus from Hellas proper; further, Kerkyra and Ambrakia are identified as “Greek cities” (πόλις Ἑλληνίς), which suggests that he conceived of Epirus as non-Greek.

The discussion in this section would have benefitted from knowledge of the work of I. Malkin, who has written extensively on Epeirote ethnicity.<sup>3</sup> Malkin has shown that all these factors — kinship, language, religion, way of life — are not objective truths. Even in the case of language, it is unclear at what point the southern mainland Greeks might have considered a dialect (West Greek in the case of the Epirotes) to be a different language.<sup>4</sup> While it is true that from a modern scholarly perspective that the Epeirotes may reasonably be classified as Greeks, Greeks from Akarnania to Attica down into the Peloponnese could well have considered the Epeirotes not to be Greeks simply because cultural affiliation with kinship, language, religion and way of life is fundamentally subjective.

2 G. Shipley, *Pseudo-Skylax’s Periplus: the circumnavigation of the inhabited world* (Exeter 2011) 1-22, 29-30, 60-61 and 111-15.

3 I. Malkin, *The returns of Odysseus: colonization and ethnicity* (Berkeley, CA 1998) 132-40; “Greek ambiguities: between ‘ancient Hellas’ and ‘barbarian Epirus’,” in id. (ed.), *Ancient perceptions of Greek ethnicity* (Washington, D.C. 2001) 188-94.

4 For Epeirote ethnicity and language, see also N. G. L. Hammond, *Epirus. The geography, the ancient remains, the history and the topography of Epirus and adjacent areas* (Oxford 1967) 422-24 and 525-33; P. Cabanes, “Les habitants des régions situées au nord-ouest de la Grèce antique étaient-ils des étrangers aux yeux des gens de Grèce centrale et méridionale?” in R. Lonis (ed.), *L’étranger dans le monde grec* (Nancy 1988) 89-111; J. J. Wilkes, *The Illyrians* (Oxford 1992) 102-4; M. B. Hatzopoulos, “The boundaries of Hellenism in Epirus during antiquity,” in M. B. Sakellariou (ed.), *Epirus: 4000 years of Greek history and civilization* (Athens 1997) 140-45; N. Ceka, *The Illyrians to the Albanians* (Tirana 2013) 64-68; E. A. Meyer, *The inscriptions of Dodona and a new history of Molossia* (Stuttgart 2013) 72-79.

The word *barbaroi* used by Strabo and earlier by Thucydides in reference to the Epirotes has been shown to be closely tied to conceptions of “civilization”, or a lack thereof, rather than to ethnic attributes of Epirote language and race.<sup>5</sup> In other words, Greek notions of “civilization” are deeply imbedded in their perceptions of Epirus, which today serves to obfuscate a wide range of regional characteristics, from cultural identity and language to settlement patterns and urbanization. This bias in the ancient sources is what makes Podini’s study of the archaeological evidence so important, since monumental architecture is closely tied to Greek conceptions of “civilization”. Indigenous urbanism did not emerge in Epirus until the last decades of the 4th c. B.C. Greek colonies (Kerkyra, Apollonia, Epidamnos, Ambrakia, Leukas, Anaktorion) from the 8th c. onward did not immediately spawn urbanization in Epirus. The late development of Epirote cities explains in part why Thucydides viewed the region as primitive and barbarian. Podini argues (199) that the incipient phases of urbanism there were thoroughly inspired by Greek culture (“*ispirazione completamente ellenica*”), judging by, amongst other things, the design and use of public and private spaces, the disposition and function of buildings, and the types of fortifications.

While over the years scholars have noted some features of Epeirote architecture in respect to that of Greece, Magna Graecia or Macedonia, through a comprehensive survey of the material remains Podini examines systematically the specific attributes that make up Epeirote architecture and explains how they differ from that of other regions. First, Epirus features greater typological variation, particularly in Doric capitals, than do the neighboring regions. Second, the adoption of Hellenic architectural forms occurred selectively, often in a hybrid character, while showing a strong conservative tradition. According to Podini, this is exemplified by the Ionic capital with pulvinus decoration of a calyx (II.B.3.1.2) and by the general absence of the Corinthian order (II.B.4.1) throughout the region. Third, Epirote architecture has some unique attributes — e.g., the widespread use of the polygonal-octagonal order (II.B.1) and the form of bases with expanded upper torus (II.B.3.2.3). He argues that these features reflect “Greek provincialism” rather than an indigenous or autochthonous development; in other words, the architectural decorations of Hellenistic Epirus did not derive from some latent indigenous tradition, but rather from cultural influences that arose when Epirus became more closely integrated into the Greek world. He believes that, when indigenous urbanization began, the Epirotes were seeking models and lifestyles that were more cosmopolitan, and that they drew inspiration specifically from the Peloponnese. The emergence of Epirote monumental architecture began around 330 B.C. during the Epirote *symmachia*, which brought the political unification of individual tribes. In Podini’s view, the territorial expansion and unification of Epirus under Pyrrhus (281-272 B.C.) was key to the establishment of Epirote architectural forms during this incipient phase of adoption and innovation, but the process was not “immediate, direct, or unidirectional”.

## 2. Core-periphery dynamism in the Hellenistic period

One of the work’s most important contributions is to contextualize Epirote architecture with respect to Greece, Illyria, Macedonia and Magna Graecia. Because the development of Epirote architecture occurred within a complex core-periphery system, Podini is interested in examining Epirote responses to Greek architectural forms and the ways in which Epirus participated in a broader Greek architectural *koine*. The Peloponnese is shown to have influenced Epirus profoundly, much like it did Macedonia. During the early phase (late 4th-3rd c.) Epirus adopted the Ionic order from the Peloponnese. The process of architectural dissemination involved a complex dynamic not only between core and periphery but also between peripheral regions themselves. The author argues that Macedonia acted as a “filter” in the dissemination of Peloponnesian forms and decorative motifs into Epirus. This would explain why the Corinthian order, which is rare in Macedonia in the 4th and 3rd c., is completely absent in Epirus during that same period.

5 J. Isager, “Eretria in Epirus and the foundation of Nikopolis: models of civilization in Strabo,” in id. (ed.), *Foundation and destruction: Nikopolis and Northwestern Greece* (Athens 2001) 17-26.

Epirus, however, was not a passive recipient: it responded with its own independent and innovative architectural forms as well. According to Podini, the widespread deployment of the polygonal-octagonal order across Epirus and into S Illyria reflects an architectural form preferred during the incipient period of Epirote urbanism. The polygonal-octagonal order was deployed throughout the 3rd c., achieving a standardized form under the *koinon* of the Epirotes (232-168 B.C.). While the origin of the polygonal-octagonal order is Peloponnesian, the scale and extent of its use, for both public and private buildings, is an Epirote trait. Podini argues that a particular Ionic capital with large-disk scrolls and cyma-reversa echinus (cat. no. 21) reflects a conservative tradition that resisted influences from Illyria, where a different composite Ionic capital (cat. nos. 32-34) arose under S Italian and Macedonian influences. He posits that these influences in Illyria arrived through its ports of Oricum, Apollonia and Dyrrachium, and overland by the *via Egnatia*.

Podini also attempts to contextualize the rôle of Epirus in the larger artistic and cultural framework of the Ionian-Adriatic region. The adoption of the Ionic “diagonal” capital represents the earliest architectural influence from the Peloponnese. Podini argues that this same capital appeared in Sicily in the 3rd c. B.C. as a result of the close relationship between Epirus and Sicily established by Pyrrhus. He identifies other architectural types that also passed through Epirus before reaching Italy. One is the Ionic capitals with the pulvinus decoration of a calyx (cat. nos. 28-31). Another is the Attic base with an expanded upper torus (cat. nos. 64-65 and 67-70). He sees this latter as the prototype that became the canonical “Roman-Ionic” style, which spread across the entire Western Empire (in Greece and Asia Minor the Ionic-Attic style prevailed).

Podini argues that cultural influences between Magna Graecia and Epirus became complex and two-directional after the initial phase (“fase di andata”) when Peloponnesian forms passed through Epirus to Italy. This second phase is said to represent a ‘cultural osmosis’ between the twin coasts (Ionian and Adriatic), resulting in a dynamism that brought about the Corinthian figural capitals and sofa capitals (cat. nos. 35-36). Interestingly, he theorizes that the trigger in this process may have been the diaspora of artists and artisans following the Roman destruction of Syracuse (211 B.C.) and Tarentum (209 B.C.).

### 3. Roman imperialism

Podini argues that the rich diversity of architectural forms with respect to both stone types and decoration became subsumed under a somewhat homogeneous Roman imperial art. Architectural production decreased and now became more standardized. In Hellenistic times Epirus had seen a greater diversity in architectural materials, which included conglomerate, sandstone and various types of limestone, along with a greater familiarity with stone working. Stucco was applied extensively in the Hellenistic period, as was the case in the Peloponnese and Macedonia. According to Podini, the diversity of architectural forms arising from foreign Greek influences and a general period of prosperity lasted in Epirus well into the 2nd c. B.C., as attested by the widespread construction of public buildings and the luxurious estates of a ruling élite.

Then, he argues, a production vacuum (“vuoto produttivo”) occurred between the end of the 2nd and second half of the 1st c. B.C. This lacuna in architectural production he considers attributable to a century of warfare that brought economic devastation to the region. The wars included the destruction of the kingdom of the Molossians in 167 by Aemilius Paulus, the First Mithridatic War (89-85), and the civil wars between Caesar and Pompey (49-48) and between Octavian and Antony (31-30 B.C.). Epirus is said to have emerged in the late 1st c. B.C. exhausted (“completamente spossato”). While he is probably correct to see warfare as a major factor, some fundamental regional changes that occurred when Epirus transitioned to a Roman province should have contributed to the architectural developments noted. For one thing, *negotiatores* appear to have established large estates (*latifundia*). Varro refers to them as *Epirotici*, many of whom operated large-scale pastoral ranches.<sup>6</sup> More importantly, the complex changes

6 RR 2.1.2 and 2.5.10. At RR 2.2.1 and 2.5.1 he also calls these men *Epirotae* and *Synepirotae*.



Fig. 1. Butrint, Roman Forum Excavations Project 2012: South Stoa I, 1st c. B.C., sandstone columns *in situ*.

in the outlook of the local élite and in patterns of civic benefaction under an imperial system favored coastal sites and seaports.<sup>7</sup> Inland sites such as Phoinike and Amantia, removed from major channels of communication, fared poorly as urban centers. The economic downturn was not consistent across Epirus. At Buthrotum, for example, architectural production probably increased with major benefactions from or due to the agency of Cicero's confidante Titus Pomponius Atticus, one of the wealthiest Romans of his day. South Stoa I in the Forum, the largest building constructed during the Hellenistic period, is contemporary with the period in which Atticus was at Butrint (fig. 1).<sup>8</sup> The 'production vacuum' may not have applied to coastal sites such as Buthrotum.

Podini notes that marble and granite are found almost exclusively at coastal sites, primarily ports tied to Mediterranean maritime trade. On sites in the interior, marble finds derive from statues, almost never from architecture. Again, the explanations for these differences are attributed to trade and imperial-era lines of communication, rather than to the outcomes of provincial administration. The underlying causes of discontinuities in Epirote architectural production and the reasons for the emergence and distribution of new forms still require further examination (see further below).

#### 4. Roman imperial architecture

Podini sees the 1st c. B.C. as the transitional period ("fase di rottura") between Hellenistic and Roman. The first sign of this transition is the Roman-Doric capital (cat. nos. 15-19), attested exclusively at Butrint. It emerges following Roman colonization (44 B.C.) of the city in the theater's *scaenae frons* (cat. nos. 90 and 110-11), in the nymphaeum at the terminus of the aqueduct (cat. no. 92), and elsewhere (cat. nos. 91, 93 and 120). Under Augustus, architecture was

7 S. E. Alcock, *Graecia capta: the landscapes of Roman Greece* (Cambridge 1993); *Archaeologies of the Greek past: landscape, monuments, and memories* (Cambridge 2002); A. D. Rizakis, "Roman colonies in the province of Achaia: territories, land and population," in S. E. Alcock (ed.), *The early Roman Empire in the East* (Oxford 1997) 15-36; L. Revell, *Roman imperialism and local identities* (Cambridge 2009); A. J. S. Spawforth, *Greece and the Augustan cultural revolution: Greek culture in the Roman world* (Cambridge 2012).

8 D. R. Hernandez and Dh. Çondi, "The formation of Butrint: new insights from excavations in the Roman Forum," in L. Përzhita, I. Gjipali, G. Hoxha and B. Muka (ed.), *Proceedings of the Int. Congress of Albanian Archaeological Studies* (Tirana 2014) 285-302.

largely standardized and of high quality. With Epirus lacking marble of its own, this fine stone, including colored marbles and granites, first began to be imported after c.44 B.C., resulting in a greater concentration of marble architecture at seaports like *Buthrotum* and Nikopolis. The arrival of Roman imperial architecture was tied to both local elite euergetism and imperial benefaction. Podini singles out three forms that appear to have arrived in Epirus specifically through imperial benefaction: Asiatic Corinthian capitals (cat. nos. 45-59), column bases of Proconnesian marble (cat. nos. 72-75), and granite columns (cat. nos. 156-58), probably from *Mons Claudianus* in Egypt.

While architectural developments of the 1st c. A.D. remain obscure, from the establishment of the province of Epirus (probably under Trajan) to the late 2nd/early 3rd c. the architecture reflects widespread prosperity founded on the *pax Romana* and sound provincial administration. This prosperity is reflected by the quality of architecture in both public buildings and the private sphere. Hadrian transformed a small settlement in the Drinos valley into a city renamed Hadrianopolis, with large theater and other public buildings. The 2nd c. A.D. is generally marked by urban aggrandizement and monumentalization stimulated by imperial benefaction. Podini argues that Butrint was the only port in Chaonia linked directly to the commercial trade in marble that ran from the East to Italy; as a result, the relationship between imperial clientage and public munificence during the High Empire was strongest at Butrint.

### Conclusion

With a firm command of the scholarship, Podini skillfully presents the nuances of many controversial issues, including Epirote identity, urbanism, and core-periphery relationships. The bibliography on research in Epirus is thorough, but one shortcoming may be the book's lack of engagement with scholarship related to Roman provincial studies (the bibliography does not include particular works of S. Alcock,<sup>9</sup> A. Rizakis,<sup>10</sup> G. Woolf,<sup>11</sup> D. Mattingly,<sup>12</sup> L. Revell<sup>13</sup> or A. Spawforth<sup>14</sup>), limiting its potential to formulate conclusions that would illuminate Epirus's transition from an autonomous Republic to a Roman province and to show how its architectural remains reflect provincial dynamics involving, for example, changing civic identities and elite interests, the rôle of the provincial governor, taxation, land allocation, or the imperial cult. A separate chapter along these lines would have helped position Podini's study within the larger body of Roman provincial studies. Yet this is not to diminish the value or the quality of the study, which is clearly groundbreaking and has much to offer archaeologists and architectural historians interested in Greek and Roman provincial architecture in Epirus, Macedonia, Illyria and Magna Graecia.

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9 Alcock 1993 and 2002 (both *supra* n.7).

10 Rizakis (*supra* n.7).

11 G. Woolf, *Becoming Roman: the origins of provincial civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge 1998).

12 D. J. Mattingly, "Becoming Roman: expressing identity in a provincial setting," *JRA* 17 (2004) 5-25.

13 Revell (*supra* n.7).

14 Spawforth (*supra* n.7).