A Sanctuary in the Hora of Illyrian Apollonia

Excavations at the Bonjakët Site (2004–2006)

Edited by
Jack L. Davis, Sharon R. Stocker, Iris Pojani, and Vangjel Dimo

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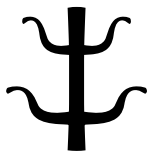

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Preface

THE BONJAKËT SITE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Jack L. Davis, Sharon R. Stocker, Vangjel Dimo, and Iris Pojani

In the years 2004–2006, a joint team from the International Centre for Albanian Archaeology in Tirana, Albania, the Institute of Archaeology in Tirana, and the University of Cincinnati conducted excavations in the plain west of the walls of the ancient Greek colony of Apollonia, a short distance to the southwest of the modern village of Pojan (Figs. 0.1, 0.2, and 1.3). The site lies almost entirely within a complex of farm buildings known locally as Bonjakët. The excavation was a continuation of a research project conducted under the auspices of the Mallakastra Regional Archaeological Project (MRAP) from 1998 to 2002.[1]

Results were particularly rewarding since a previously unknown monumental temple was discovered and documented; this work has made it possible to describe the rich history of ancient cult practice at the site. The Greek temple, which appears to have been built in the Late Classical period, is only the third to be found at Apollonia.[2]

MODERN SETTING OF THE ANCIENT REMAINS

The complex of modern buildings at Bonjakët consists of two principal dwellings that were occupied by 14 individuals at the time of our excavations; all were members of two extended families, descended from Hamdi and Sejdi Bonjakët, brothers who, in 1928, in the time of Ahmet Zogu, migrated to the Pojan area from Kosovo (Figs. 0.3 and 0.4).[3] The brothers built houses, one of which, although no longer occupied as a residence, still defined the northeastern side of the present Bonjakët compound.

1. Davis et al. 1998, 2006, 2007; Galaty et al. 2004; Runnels et al. 2004; Stocker 2009.

2. The only monumental Greek temple that stands today at Apollonia is the Doric building at Shtyllas, situated on a knoll immediately southeast of the polis center (see, most recently, Quantin 1996; Lenhardt and Quantin 2007, pp. 322–331); the date of its construction is unclear, as is the divinity to whom it was dedicated, although Artemis has been suggested (Lenhardt and Quantin 2007, p. 331). In addition, foundations of a building excavated on the lower acropolis of the city (Hill 104) have been tentatively identified as a temple to Artemis (Praschniker 1922–1924, cols. 35–40; Ceka 1958, p. 217; Dimo, Lenhardt, and Quantin 2007b, pp. 243–244, 246). Elsewhere in Albania, in 2001, a previously unknown temple was located at Spitalla near ancient Epidamnus/Dyrrachium (modern Durrës, hereafter Dyrrachium when in reference to the ancient city; Davis et al. 2003, pp. 61, 80–81). It has now been excavated in the course of several campaigns (Lafe 2004–2005, p. 124), and, in 2003, a second similar temple was found several kilometers farther north at Bisht i Pallës (Ndrenika and Booth 2007, pp. 51–53).

3. Zogu was president (1925–1928), then king (1928–1939) of Albania.

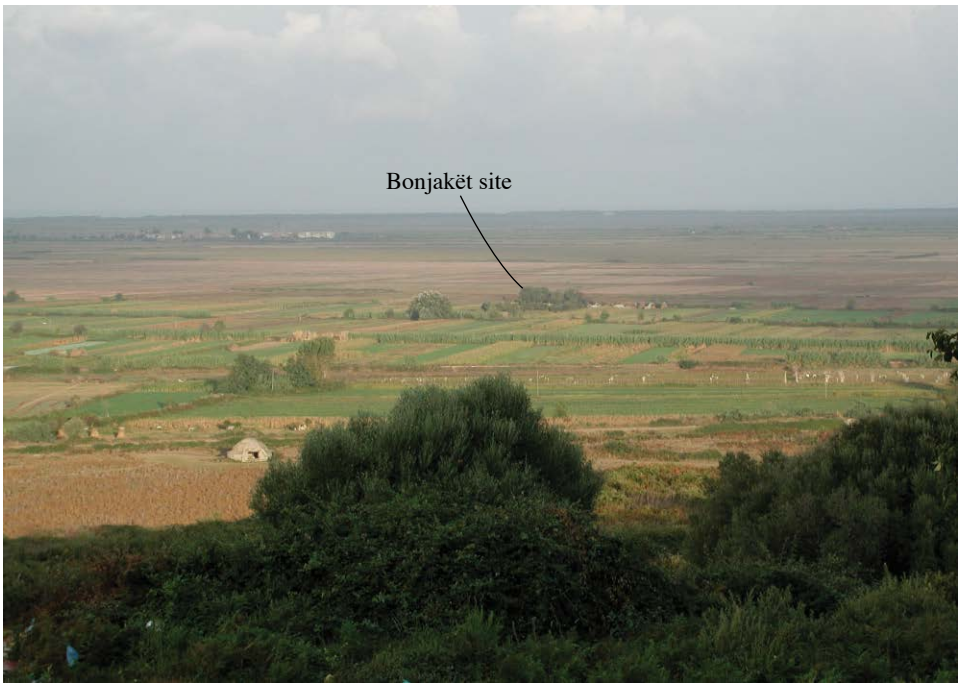

Figure 0.1. The Bonjakët site viewed from the Apollonia acropolis. Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati

Figure 0.2. View of the Apollonia acropolis from the Bonjakët site in 1960. Courtesy Institute of Archaeology, Tirana

Figure 0.3. The Bonjakët compound in 1960. Courtesy Institute of Archaeology, Tirana

Figure 0.4. The Bonjakët compound in 2004. Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati

Figure 0.5. Cleaning the mosaic in 1960. Courtesy Institute of Archaeology, Tirana

In 2003, members of our team became aware of plans being formulated by the Ministry of Transportation of Albania to improve communications between Tirana and Vlora. An extension to the national highway of Albania was planned that would bypass the city of Fier. The highway would run west of the acropolis of Apollonia, through its lower city and cemeteries, and would clip the eastern edge of the site of Bonjakët. In one fell swoop, a quiet, isolated, and largely vacant rural landscape would be exposed to the hustle and bustle of economic development.

Immediate action was required. Steps were taken to inform the Ministry of Transportation and other relevant parties in Tirana that extensive damage would be done to the antiquities of Apollonia should the highway be constructed along the proposed course. At the same time, an initiative was taken to mitigate the losses that would be incurred if the road was built as planned: excavations at the Bonjakët site began in September 2004, and, shortly thereafter, fields along the proposed route of the highway were intensively surveyed, and test excavations were initiated by the rescue unit of the International Centre for Albanian Archaeology in Tirana.

THE BONJAKËT SITE IN ITS LANDSCAPE

The results of our archaeological investigations at the Bonjakët site reinforce those of geological studies previously conducted in the plain west of the acropolis of Apollonia. Eric Fouache and his colleagues had identified several ancient beach fronts there, concluding that, during "toute l'Antiquité la plaine littorale se limite au piémont des collines molassiques, à une bande de deux à trois kilomètres de large qui borde des marécages et des lagunes séparées de la mer par un cordon sableux." This landscape remained relatively stable from the 7th century B.C. until the 7th century A.D.[4] The discovery in his core PS3 of a beach contemporary with the Greek colony allows the reconstruction of an ancient coastline in a position that is only ca. 1 km to the west of the Bonjakët site.

4. Fouache et al. 2004, p. 259.

An ancient coastline in this position is, in fact, precisely what has been predicted on the basis of intensive survey.[5] It is also clear that by the Hellenistic period, a substantial suburb had been established outside the walls of the city in a 1 km-wide coastal plain west of the acropolis of Apollonia.[6] Concentrations of ancient artifacts extend only a bit more than 1 km west of the acropolis walls before stopping abruptly at a point where the elevation of the plain becomes almost imperceptibly lower. It is likely that this falloff in density marks the edge of what in antiquity had been lagoons and marshes lying between Apollonia and the open sea.[7]

THE EXCAVATIONS IN BRIEF

We were drawn to the Bonjakët site by finds made in the course of surface investigations in 2002. Later we discovered that there had already been excavations at the site in 1960 (Fig. 0.5).[8] Three campaigns (2004–2006) then set those discoveries in a broader cultural context, adding greatly to what was known about the area west of the Apollonia acropolis. The recent excavations have also emphasized the extraordinary and singular importance of the Bonjakët site for our understanding of the first centuries of Greek colonization in the Adriatic.

A large stone temple was built at the Bonjakët site in the Late Classical period. Its foundation courses of sandstone were well preserved, but only scanty fragments of a limestone and marble superstructure remained. Soundings beneath the level of the foundations of the temple have provided a glimpse of ritual practice as early as the last quarter of the 7th century B.C. Worshippers dedicated many exotic objects at the temple, including some made of metal and glass; many of the artifacts find close parallels at the sanctuary of Poseidon at Isthmia and in the sanctuary of Hera at Perachora. In the Archaic period the sanctuary stood in isolation from the colony of Apollonia; surface survey suggests that the plain was relatively uninhabited at that time.

We cannot be certain about the deity or deities worshipped at this temple. Considering the location of the sanctuary, which likely defined the territory of Apollonia at its western extreme, it is possible to propose that Artemis was the divinity worshipped there.[9] Indeed, a stele, which we found immured in the wall of a Roman building southeast of the sanctuary, bore a depiction of Artemis with a torch, and a dedicatory inscription named her.[10] Still, the hundreds, if not thousands, of Hellenistic terracotta figurines depicting paired male and female reclining banqueters, many accompanied by a figure of Eros, may point to the worship of a divinity such as Aphrodite.[11] A Roman mosaic was uncovered nearby.

5. Davis et al. 2006; on the likely position of these lagoons, marshes, and the coastline of the Adriatic in antiquity, see Fouache 2002, p. 19, fig. 9; Fouache et al. 2004, p. 257, fig. 9; and Fouache 2007, pp. 3–13, fig. 7.

6. Davis et al. 2007, pp. 13–23.

7. Stocker 2009, p. 4, no. 12, and pp. 657–673.

8. This history of exploration is thoroughly documented in Chapter 1.

9. Davis et al. 2006. On sanctuaries in Albania similarly placed in liminal positions, see Davis et al. 2003, pp. 69–70 and n. 68; Quantin 1996.

10. See Chapter 3, this volume, for a discussion of the find context of the stele in trench 06T/07T/08T/09T. For the stele, see also Davis et al. 2006, fig. 4. We thank Peter van Minnen for offering us his opinion on the date of the inscription. Concerning other dedications to Artemis at Apollonia, see Robert 1950, pp. 70–73; see also Cabanes 1986, pp. 153–154. Cabanes, who published a relief from Apollonia dedicated to Artemis Limnatis, suggested that her sanctuary was located in the lower part of the city, perhaps even outside the walls "dans la zone des maris qui bordaient l'embouchure de l'Aoos...," and should be distinguished from a temple of Artemis Proscopa, which he identifies with the foundations found by Leon Rey on Hill 104 at Apollonia (1986, pp. 152–153; see also Quantin 2004, p. 596, who exhaustively surveys evidence for the cult of Artemis at Apollonia). Cabanes's is an attractive suggestion, and it can be imagined that worship at the Bonjakët site was associated with Artemis Limnatis. The location of the sanctuary would be appropriate (see Cole 2004, pp. 178–197, on "landscapes of Artemis"). It is, however, far from clear that the relief found near the Bonjakët site depicts Artemis Limnatis. The presence of a torch is of little help since another representation from Apollonia with the same attribute is identified as Artemis Agrota. Moreover, firsthand examination of the stele suggested to François Quantin (pers. comm. May 30, 2005; see also Quantin 2007, p. 321) that the goddess represented was Artemis Soteira, rather than Artemis Limnatis. He writes: "J'ai fait un estampage de l'inscription, ce qui ne rend pas la lecture plus claire. Il me semble que nous avons deux lettres rondes au début de l'épiclèse, peut-être un sigma lunaire et un oméga, ce qui permettrait de proposer l'épiclèse Sôteira, ou Sôtèra, ce qui conviendrait parfaitement avec la torche."

11. See discussion by Dimo et al. 2007, who, after Quantin 1996, also suggest a cult of Aphrodite on the basis of the figurines—without, however, excluding Artemis.

Clearly much work remains to be done. Only a fraction of the temple foundations has been cleared, and the Archaic deposits beneath them are still largely untouched. Remains earlier than the end of the 7th century B.C. may yet be found. Because the Bonjakët compound is an active farm, the progress of our excavation was slowed by the necessity of respecting the rhythms of the daily life of the residents, and we consequently had to backfill trenches at the end of each campaign. A visitor to Bonjakët thus sees nothing of our results—a pity since the site and its finds have potential value as a tourist attraction, especially if they can be presented within the overall program of the national park of Apollonia.

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We are grateful to Dr. David W. Packard and to the Packard Humanities Institute for funding our excavations in all three seasons, a study season in 2007, and during the initial stages of preparation of this publication in 2007–2009. We thank the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, and the National Geographic Society for their support of MRAP, and the Semple Fund of the University of Cincinnati for assistance provided to MRAP and the Bonjakët Excavations. We also thank Marin Hadjimihali, director of the National Park of Apollonia, for allowing us to use his offices as workspace in 2007. Our research also benefited in many ways from the collegiality of our friend Richard Hodges.

Excavations at Bonjakët were conducted in 2004, as an extension of the research pursued by MRAP, with the kind permission of the director of the Institute of Archaeology in Tirana, Muzafer Korkuti. In 2005–2007, the project was authorized under its own permit. Fieldwork was codirected by Iris Pojani, Vangjel Dimo, Sharon R. Stocker, and Jack L. Davis. Evi Gorogianni served as field director, Tammie L. Gerke as geoarchaeologist, and Kathleen M. Lynch was responsible for the study of the pottery. Participants in the project included Natalie Abell (2006, 2007), Catherine Alexander (2005–2007), Susan Allen (2005), Christian Cloke (2006), Sarah Dieterle (2005), Arjan Dimo (2006, 2007), Kori Duncan (2004), Rexhep Halili (2004), Elio Hobdari (2004, 2005), Julie Hruby (2007), Gentjana Kosturi (2005), Genci Kotepano (2004, 2006), Ols Lafe (2004, 2005), Mustafa Laze (2005), Sarah Lima (2005, 2006), Anton Lulgjuroj (2006), Jonida Martini (2006, 2007), Ethan McGory (2006), Megan McNames (2006, 2007), Spiro Nika (2005, 2006), Ilir Parangani (2006), Marian Parker (2005), Dorentin Pashaj (2005), Melinda Russell (2005, 2006), Ann Santen (2005, 2006), Allison Sterrett-Krause (2007), Shannan Stewart (2004, 2005, 2007), Matthew Straughan-Morse (2005, 2006), Jed Thorn (2006), Brian Trail (2005, 2006), John Wallrodt (2005), Julie Wilson (2006, 2007), and Ilir Zaloshnja (2005). Skënder Muçaj represented the Institute of Archaeology in 2004. We thank Lorenc Bejko of the International Centre for Albanian Archaeology for his help. We are also grateful to the specialists who furthered the goals of the project, most of whom enjoy authorship in this volume or are otherwise credited. Less obvious will be the contribution of Alma Bardho, who, at short notice, in 2007 was enlisted to conserve bronze and iron artifacts. Artifact drawings are the work of Catherine Alexander (2005–2007), Jack L. Davis (2004), Allison Sterrett-Krause (2007), Rosemary Robertson (2007), and Shannan Stewart (2004, 2007); architectural drawings were prepared by Catherine Alexander and Elio Hobdari (2004, 2005). All illustrations were made ready in final electronic form by Rosemary Robertson and prepared for publication by Tina Ross, who also is responsible for the design of this book and its layout. John Wallrodt designed the project's data bases, managed our GIS, and produced electronic plans.

Finally we thank Susan Lupack for her initial editing of text and tables; Billie Jean Collins of Lockwood Press for her enthusiastic support of our plans for publication; Jeffrey Kramer, Carol Hershenson, and Joseph Katenkamp for support in Cincinnati; and Karl Petruso for his warm endorsement of this book and all our ventures in Albania. He led the way.

Chapter 12

THE BONJAKËT SITE IN RETROSPECT

Jack L. Davis, Sharon R. Stocker, Iris Pojani, and Vangjel Dimo

The full publication in this volume of the results of three campaigns of excavation at Bonjakët from 2004 to 2006 is in itself important, we believe, but it also underscores the potential that the site holds for further exploration. We can, for example, now document for the first time the material remains of Greek rituals as practiced at the time of, or not long after, the foundation of Apollonia. Further excavation would certainly shed more light on early stages in the history of the colony and would also tell us much more about the character of the temple, so little of which could be exposed by us, and also about that of its predecessors.

Whereas prior to 1998 virtually nothing was known about Apollonia in the Archaic period except for its cemeteries, fewer than 10 years later we were in a position to say much more about the development of the settlement in the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. Intensive survey by the MRAP in an area of 35 sq km around the acropolis of Apollonia demonstrated that the activities of the colonists had as yet had a very low impact on the landscape: finds of the Archaic period were very restricted in their distribution.[1] Indeed, that was one factor that initially focused our attention on the Bonjakët site, inasmuch as it was the only location west of the Apollonia acropolis where Archaic pottery was found by our teams.

Stocker has written more generally about the results of the survey in regard to the Archaic period. Although it is clear that the Apollonia necropolis was already in use and that Greek transport and storage vessels had reached Margelliç, a non-Greek inland settlement ca. 25 km southeast of Apollonia, she observes:

> There is nothing in our data to suggest an influx of Illyrians into the apoikia, or that attests to mingling of Illyrians and Greeks in the Archaic and Classical periods; the material culture found in the zones near Apollonia is typically and exclusively "Greek." Greeks were not the only ones who used Greek-style products, however. The zones west of the Gjanica [River] demonstrate this most clearly: although imported Archaic products, specifically transport amphoras and black glaze vessels, moved across the river, the fact that they are found in conjunction with contemporary indigenous ceramics argues that they were used by natives, rather than by Greek settlers. Rigid territorial boundaries and distinctions between Greeks and non-Greeks appear to have been maintained until the Hellenistic period. There was little or no permanent occupation in the hinterland of Apollonia during the Archaic and Classical periods, possibly because the colonists felt unsafe living far from the city center. For whatever reason, the colonists and their ancestors chose largely to reside inside the city walls throughout the 5th century B.C. and probably few Greeks, if any, resided in the countryside before the end of the 4th century B.C. Many of the inhabitants of the polis probably engaged in trade, which might have

1. On the results of survey pertinent to the earliest history of Apollonia, see Davis et al. 2007, pp. 18–19, and especially Stocker 2009, chapter 9.

> further anchored them to the asty. Others, however, as indicated by Herodotus, were pastoralists or farmers. Yet they, too, lived in the city, rather than on or near their land.[2]

The fundamental Greekness of the material culture in the hinterland of Apollonia, as revealed by survey, accords well with the evidence from our excavations at Bonjakët, where cult practices seem purely Greek in character. We have found no evidence of the sort of Mischkultur recognized by Maria Grazia Amore in hers and Lorenc Bejko's meticulous excavations of Tumuli 9, 10, and 11 at Apollonia.[3] There she has suggested that the "colonists-indigenous relationships remain complex and strongly marked by cultural integration on [the] one hand, and expression of group identities through symbolic use of material culture, on the other."[4]

By great good fortune, in 2006, as we were reaching Archaic levels at Bonjakët, French colleagues discovered remains of what appear to be the earliest Greek settlement on the acropolis of Apollonia.[5] Since then, explorations have continued, the oldest finds dating to the second half of the 7th century. These discoveries, together with a more accurate understanding of the chronology of the fortifications of the acropolis, are for the first time providing us with some understanding of the structure of the settlement in its earliest stages.[6] Thus far no evidence for the mixing of indigenous and Greek elements has been reported.

The fact that the stone temple at Bonjakët was destroyed sometime in the Hellenistic period, not so long after it had been built, and the apparent cessation of cult by Roman times cry out for explanation. Surely the direct causes, although undocumented by any specific historical source, must lie in the political turbulence characteristic of the later centuries before Christ and in the acts of violence that periodically violated Apollonia's territorial integrity. Stocker has written:

> In 229 B.C. circumstances combined with individual agency to irrevocably alter the coast of the Adriatic and to put in motion a chain of events that led ultimately to the Roman conquest of Greece. The execution by Teuta of two ambassadors sent by Rome set the stage, and Apollonia became embroiled in battles that continued until southern Illyria was finally incorporated as a Roman province. The individual actions of Demetrius of Pharos, Scerdilaidas, Philip V, Perseus, and Aemilius Paullus, and the consequences of their choices, demonstrate the essential power of agency in the determination of historical trajectories. The incorporation of Apollonia within the Empire marked another shift in patterns of rural settlement and land use—this time a contraction back to the asty and perhaps an accompanying extensification in agricultural production.[7]

We find it ironic, but fascinating, that some 30 years after the death of Enver Hoxha, substantial progress is at last being made toward addressing the research agenda that he himself set for archaeology—but with an agenda stripped of the veil of Communist ideology and freed from the pressure to reach any "right" conclusion.

Hoxha wrote with confidence that while it was clear that the civilization of ancient Greece influenced that of the Albanians, it was also unthinkable that the ancient civilization of the Albanians did not influence that of the Greek people.[8] On the other hand, Hoxha considered it crucial for "scientists" to maintain a separation between the two cultures: "That which is Illyrian is Illyrian and that which is Greek should be considered Greek."[9]

2. Stocker 2009, pp. 893–894. More recently, for a review of conditions in the hinterland of Apollonia prior to Greek colonization, see Papadopoulos et al. 2014, pp. 3–10; also pp. 323–324, regarding contact after colonization.

3. Concerning the cemeteries of Apollonia, see Lafe 2003; Dimo, Fenet, and Mano 2007; and especially Amore 2010.

4. Amore 2010, pp. 693–694.

5. See Verger and Shpuza 2014 with references to earlier campaigns in this location, Sector 15.

6. One section of the fortifications has been suggested to belong to the 6th century B.C.; see Koço 1987. On the fortifications more generally, see Balandier, Koço, and Lenhardt 2007.

7. Stocker 2009, p. 900; see also Forsén 2019 for the larger social and political context in Epiros.

8. Hoxha 1976, p. 362; see also Hoxha 1985, p. 33; Korkuti 1988, p. 9.

9. Korkuti 1988, p. 9.

The years following the end of Communism in Albania have been exciting times in still other ways. Archaeology in Albania has developed in leaps and bounds, at times reveling in projects jointly organized by Albanian and foreign institutions, and by state and private enterprises. Our own efforts at Bonjakët built on those of the MRAP, an earlier American-Albanian collaboration between the University of Cincinnati and the Institute of Archaeology at Tirana. Both at Bonjakët and at Durrës in 2001 we also enjoyed fruitful partnerships with the International Centre of Albanian Archaeology in Tirana.[10] One obvious result deriving from the opening of Albania since 1991 is that Western archaeological standards are now firmly established, and a strong graduate program in a Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies has been founded at the University of Tirana with related programs at Durrës and Elbasan. We were privileged to witness these developments and to participate in them for a decade (1996–2006).

Finally, it is particularly gratifying to us that our exploration of the Bonjakët site has already made a difference to the development and preservation of cultural heritage at Apollonia. Plans to direct a superhighway (the Fier bypass) between the Bonjakët compound and the acropolis of Apollonia were modified in response to requests from archaeologists.[11] A survey, followed by a series of test pits, demonstrated that extensive ancient remains lay along the proposed route of the highway.[12] It is clear to us that much would now be gained by incorporating the Bonjakët site within the national park at Apollonia, so that it may take its rightful place alongside the more prominent temple site at Shtyllas as a destination for tourists and scholars alike.

10. For Dyrrachium, see Davis et al. 2003.
11. Hammond 2005.
12. Ndreniku and Booth 2006, pp. 25–26.