



I.1 INTRODUCTION

The small promontory of Chalkis is situated on the coast of Aitolia directly opposite Patras. Its harbour lies well protected in between the majestic Varassova and Klokova mountains, which were conspicuous and important landmarks throughout antiquity and early modern history (Fig. 2).

The history of Chalkis belongs to a crucial chapter in ancient Greek history when Greek colonization in the western Mediterranean and the Adriatic Sea took a big leap forward. In modern times, this period in Greek history has often been understood as an encounter between an “old” world and a “new” world, intentionally or unintentionally inspired by the meeting between Europe and the Americas, or the meeting between Great Britain and Australia/New Zealand. Even if such comparisons have been rightfully criticized as coloured by modern imperialistic attitudes to archaeology, other explanatory approaches to Greek colonization have been much hampered by a lack of settlement material from the “home” regions of the earliest colonizers.¹

Chalkis is situated in that very part of Greece, which constituted the gateway for seaborne communication between the societies in the Corinthian-Achaean region and the communities in Sicily, South Italy and on the coasts facing the Adriatic Sea (Fig. 3) (Fig. 4). The site has produced enough material to give a good impression of some of the effects exerted by the colonies in the west on the colonizing regions, and on some of the processes that led to the colonial enterprises and speeded up the formation of cities and urban centres (Fig. 5). Chalkis also belongs chronologically to that very period in which poets and artists began to turn their attention to Trojan War myths, and it is part of the region in which the stories of Odysseus took place and formed a kind of “epic map” of unfamiliar shores and customs.² Chalkis gives direct insight into the daily life of many of the audiences for these stories. In particular, the excavations produced evidence for the appearance of courtyard houses as a new architectural house model developed especially to accommodate the weaving of important fabrics, possibly elaborate mantles which drew on regional weaving experiences and experiences from further away. This gives a valuable social context for Penelope’s famous weaving and perhaps even an explanation as to why her story was placed on a sailing route between Chalkis and the west. The “Penelope” character has in

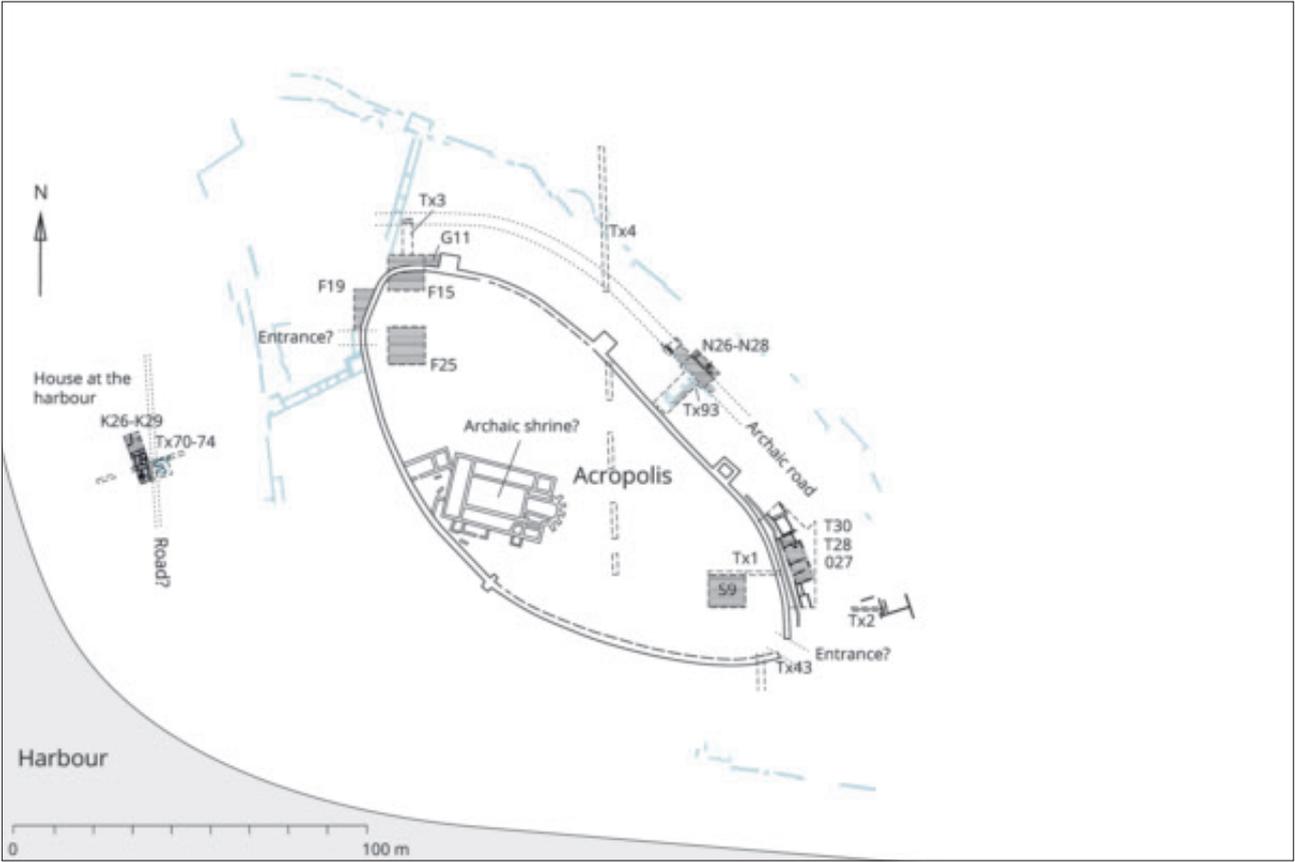
1. T.L. Dunbabin’s (Dunbabin 1948) British imperialist approach to Greek colonization in the west has given rise to many critical studies, see for instance Shepherd 1995, 51-52 and Shepherd 1999, 272 (in particular Dunbabin’s resistance to acknowledge intermarriages between the local population and colonizers); Saltini Semerai 2016; Lyons and Papadopoulos 2002; Hodos 2006, esp. 10-11.

2. Malkin 1999 and 2001.



Fig. 4 The promontory hill of Agia Triada seen from Pangali on Mount Varassova. Mount Klokova is seen in the background.

Fig. 5 Archaic Chalkis: excavation trenches with Archaic finds on the hill of Agia Triada.



many ways become a quintessential symbol of “the dutiful wife” in modern Western European history. The finds from Chalkis now offer new source material on Early Archaic womanhood, which has the potential to challenge many of these views.

The settlement on the hill of Agia Triada was inhabited during short periods at certain intervals. These phases of occupation possibly somehow related to a specialized, household based industry of bands and borders the nature of which depended on availability of precious raw fibre such as marine filaments.

All in all, the finds and results offer a rare glimpse of a new kind of cosmopolitan society which gradually arose in the Gulf of Patras as a result of increased commerce and exchange of knowledge and peoples in the Adriatic-Ionian region in the wake of the early Greek colonial enterprises.

I.2 ANCIENT WRITTEN SOURCES AND HISTORY OF INVESTIGATIONS

The small and rocky promontory hill of Agia Triada protrudes into the Gulf of Patras to the east of the modern fishing village Kato Vassiliki. To the west of the village rises Mount Varassova with 4th century BC fortification walls (at Pangali). The southern, sea-facing side of the promontory hill is steep and rises about thirty metres above sea level, while its northern side slopes more gently into a rich and fertile valley. The inland boundary of this valley is defined by the river Evenos which passes by Kalydon, before emptying into the Gulf of Patras, creating a wide delta. In the Homeric ship catalogue, Thoas led “*the Aitolians*” and he led even those “*that dwelt in Pleuron and Olenus and Pylene and Chalcis, hard by the sea* (τ’ ἀγχίαλον), and rocky (πετρήεσσα) Calydon”, and “*with Thoas there followed forty black ships*” (Il. 2.638-640).³ As we have seen, Chalkis was listed between Pylene and Kalydon (Il. 2.639), and the epithet “hard by the sea” (τ’ ἀγχίαλον) appears to be a very accurate, albeit epic description of the small promontory of Agia Triada,

3. Translated by A.T. Murray (1988).

just as “rocky” (πετρήεσσα) fits the archaeological site of Kalydon (Il. 2.640).⁴ This choice of adjectives strengthens the impression that communities named “Chalkis” and “Kalydon” existed when diverse Homeric stories were compiled into one written version.⁵

Thucydides (Thuc. I.108.5, 2.83.3), writing in the 5th century BC, referred briefly and without further explanation to Chalkis as a Corinthian city, πόλιν Κορινθίων (Thuc. I.108.5), in his description of the wars waged by Corinth against Athens to control the Western trade.⁶ According to the later Greek historian, Polybius (Polyb. 5.94.8), Chalkis still played a role as an important harbour in the wars between the Achaean and Aitolian Leagues in the 3rd century BC. By the 2nd century AD, memories of Chalkis were fading and writers debated its location, or solely referred to Chalkis as a mountain or an island or a harbour, and Strabon made a reference to a “Hypochalkis” (Strab. 9.4.8, 10.2.21; Hypochalkis: Strab. 10.2.4-5).⁷ These historical anecdotes, although few in number, nevertheless supported the identification of the promontory site as historic Chalkis. In particular, the reference by Strabo to the river Evenos and the “twin mountains” named “Taphiassos” and “Chalkis” make the identification convincing (Strab. 9.4.8, 10.2.21). The river Evenos is without doubt the one which crosses the valley of Agia Triada in the north and which passes Kalydon just before emptying into the Gulf of Patras. The two mountains,

4. See also further below on Kalydon. For a more comprehensive study of “Chalkis” in ancient written sources and early modern travellers and scholars, see Houby-Nielsen in *FPR*, 238-254.
5. Skaftø Jensen 2011 convincingly places the compilation of various local oral versions of the Homeric epics into one written version at the time of Peisistratid Athens.
6. Chalkis held polis status of Type A according to the criteria set by the Copenhagen Polis Centre (CPC). Following these criteria, type A signifies a site which is called polis in at least one source of the Archaic and/or Classical period, no matter whether polis is used in a political, territorial or urban sense (Hansen & Nielsen (eds.) 2004, 7, 382-383); Bonnier 2010, 167 (3.14); on the reference by Thucydides to Aetolians as speaking a barbarian language (Thuc. 3.94.5), see Rood 2016, esp. 109, on the generalizations made by Thucydides in his descriptions of peoples.
7. See also the mention of Chalkis by Diodorus (8.17); for Chalkis as an island forming part of the Echinades, see Plin. *HN* 4.54.



Fig. 6 Mount Varassova (to the left) and Mount Klokova (to the right), seen from the acropolis of Patras. Detail of the panorama by E. Dodwell and S. Pomardi in Fig. 2. © with courtesy from the Packard Humanities Institute.

today called Varassova and Klokova, on either side of Kato Vassiliki and the hill of Agia Triada, are the only mountains on the Aitolian coast which justify a description as “twin”. Well into the 20th century, this pair of mountains was an important landmark on all sea maps.⁸ Among the early British antiquaries who travelled to Italy and Greece in the early 19th century BC was Edward Dodwell (1777/78-1832) who had settled in Rome and married a niece of an Italian cardinal. Like many of his fellow upper-class and “gentleman” friends, Dodwell drew landscapes

and antiquities as a part-time activity on his “Grand Tour” travels, but Dodwell also strove for precision as a classical scholar. He had improved his drawing techniques through his friendship with Simone Pomardi and other professional Italian artists and made use of the mechanical drawing device of *camera obscura* to gain more accuracy and precision. Together with Pomardi, he produced a large number of drawings and panoramas of an unusual large scale, accompanied by detailed diaries. In 1805, Dodwell, the first early modern western traveller, despite the rumour of dangerous robbers in Aitolia, stepped ashore on the Aitolian coast (Mesolonghi) to inspect ruins.

8. Houby-Nielsen in *FPR*, 238-254.



Fig. 7 Mount Varassova (to the left) and Mount Klokova (to the right), seen from the acropolis of Patras (Photo: the author, 1998).

Dodwell correctly identified the river Evenos, the ruins of Pleuron and Kalydon. On February 14, he sailed towards Patras and, as the first western traveller, correctly identified Chalkis when he wrote:

“...passing near the mouth of Evenos, enjoyed a fine view of Mt Chalkis, rising majestically from the sea. It is said there are still some remains of the city of Chalkis, or Hypochalkis, at the foot of this mountain”. (Dodwell 1819, 95) (my underlining)

Ten days later, on February 23, Dodwell left Patras for Galaxidhi with a wish to visit Chalkis:

“...I wished to land, and examine the coast between the two mountains, which is very little known, but so strong is the dread of robbers, I prevail on no one to accompany me ...Between the two mountains is seen a

tract of pointed and rocky hills intermixed with plains and glens, well suited to the forts and cities of ancient times.” (Dodwell 1819, 125)

“Strabo says they [Mt Chalkis and Mt Taphiassos] are very high; that which is nearest to Naupaktos is the loftiest, and is Taphiassos ...It is evident from the geographer’s words, that Chalkis is the mountain which rises from the Euvenos ...a fetid stream [the one to the west of the Agia Triada hill] rises at the foot of those mountains and enters the gulf.”

Dodwell/Pomardi made two panorama drawings of the Aitolian and Achaean coasts viewed from the hillside of the ancient acropolis of Patras. One drawing, more than five metres long and watercoloured by Pomardi, showed the entrance to the Gulf of Patras/Kalydon and was possibly made on his first trip to

Greece in 1801.⁹ A second panorama, more than two and a half metres long, was made from the west of the castle of Patras looking towards the west-northwest (32). This panorama showed the mountains behind Patras and the peninsula of Araxos (with Teichos Dymaion) to the left, and behind these the mountains of Kephallonia (approximately in the middle). To the right, the two mountains framing Chalkis stand out on the Aitolian coast, and to the very right ruins of the ancient acropolis of Patras are seen above the “modern” town of Patras.¹⁰ The panorama by Dodwell/Pomardi was made long before the expansion of today’s Patras and the modern modification of the coastal zone. It is therefore a historical document of a lost landscape as well as an important source for the character of those coastal landscapes which the early Achaean-Aitolian colonizing communities left when they went “west” to settle in South Italy and other places in the Adriatic-Ionian region. The accuracy of the panorama is evident when compared to a recent photo of the two mountains framing Chalkis taken from the acropolis of Patras (Figs. 6-7).¹¹

After Dodwell’s initial identification of the coastal Aitolian cities and mountains, many more early modern travellers and scholars showed an interest in Aitolia. In 1897, W.J. Woodhouse published a monograph on ancient Aitolia and identified Chalkis with the Classical fortification walls on Pangali to the west of Agia Triada, primarily due to Strabon’s confusing mention of “Hypochalkis”.¹² In 1916, the Greek archaeologist K.A. Rhomaios was the first person to identify the Agia Triada hill as historic Chalkis.¹³ In more recent times, historians would still conclude that any attempt to reconstruct the history of Chalkis on the basis of the sparse written and archaeological accounts and to understand her relation to Corinth would be pure speculation:

9. K. Sloan in Camp II 2013, 35 fig. 4 (PHI 75).
10. K. Sloan in Camp II 2013, 35 fig. 4 (PHI 75), Zerniotti and Camp II 2014, 108-109 catalogue number PHI 82, four sheets, each sheet 45 × 62-64 cm. I am very grateful to J. Camp, D. Zerniotti and Marie Mauzy for help in providing the copyright for PHI 82.
11. Camp II 2013, 8-9; K. Sloan in Camp II 2013, 31-32; Houby-Nielsen in *FPR* 249-251 discusses Dodwell’s identification of Evenos, Pleuron, Kalydon and Chalkis.
12. Woodhouse 1897, 55, 63, 132-136.
13. Rhomaios 1916.

“*Es bereitet erhebliche Probleme, die Geschichte des aitolischen Chalkis und die Siedlungsgeschichtliche Entwicklung des Ortes nachzuzeichnen ...vielleicht war die Stadt erst im Verlauf des 5. Jhr v. Chr. unter Kontrolle der Korinther geraten ...Ebenso muss offenbleiben unter welchen Umständen das aitolische Chalkis von den Korinthern besetzt wurde*” (Freitag 2005 (2000), 53-57).¹⁴

This paucity of sources changed during 1995-2001 and in 2014 when the Greek-Danish archaeological investigations brought to light extensive remains of ancient settlements on the promontory of Agia Triada (Figs. 4-5). In contrast to the rich Archaic material on Agia Triada, surveys and excavations conducted on Mount Varassova, at Pangali, did not produce a single Archaic sherd, while fortification walls and other evidence attested to a function as a stronghold in the Classical period.

The investigations on Agia Triada began with a survey, in 1995, which covered all parts of the hill. The year after, in 1996, long trial trenches were opened in several different areas, which produced stratified Archaic material close to the ancient harbour and on the eastern side of the hill. Between 1997 and 2001, a series of trenches were opened in these two areas, the K-trenches at the harbour and the N-trenches on the eastern terrace of the hill. Large parts of these trenches were excavated down to bedrock. Especially the trenches at the harbour produced deep, undisturbed cultural strata from the Bronze Age settlements and the Archaic period. The strata in the N-trenches likewise produced stratified Archaic settlement material, but cultural strata were less deep, and in places partly disturbed by erosion. Archaic material was also frequently found mixed with Late Classical–Early Hellenistic material in the area of the Late Classical–Early Hellenistic houses excavated in the southern part of the eastern terrace of the hill.¹⁵ In total, approximately 50,000 sherds were processed during the survey and excavation

14. Compare also Bommeljé 1988; Bonnier 2010, 69-80, esp. 70-71, map 24-25.
15. For the stratigraphy of the excavations, see especially S. Dietz in *Chalkis Aitolias I*, figs. 21, 33-38, 55-56 and S. Dietz and E. Bollen in *Chalkis Aitolias III*, fig. 27, 77-97.

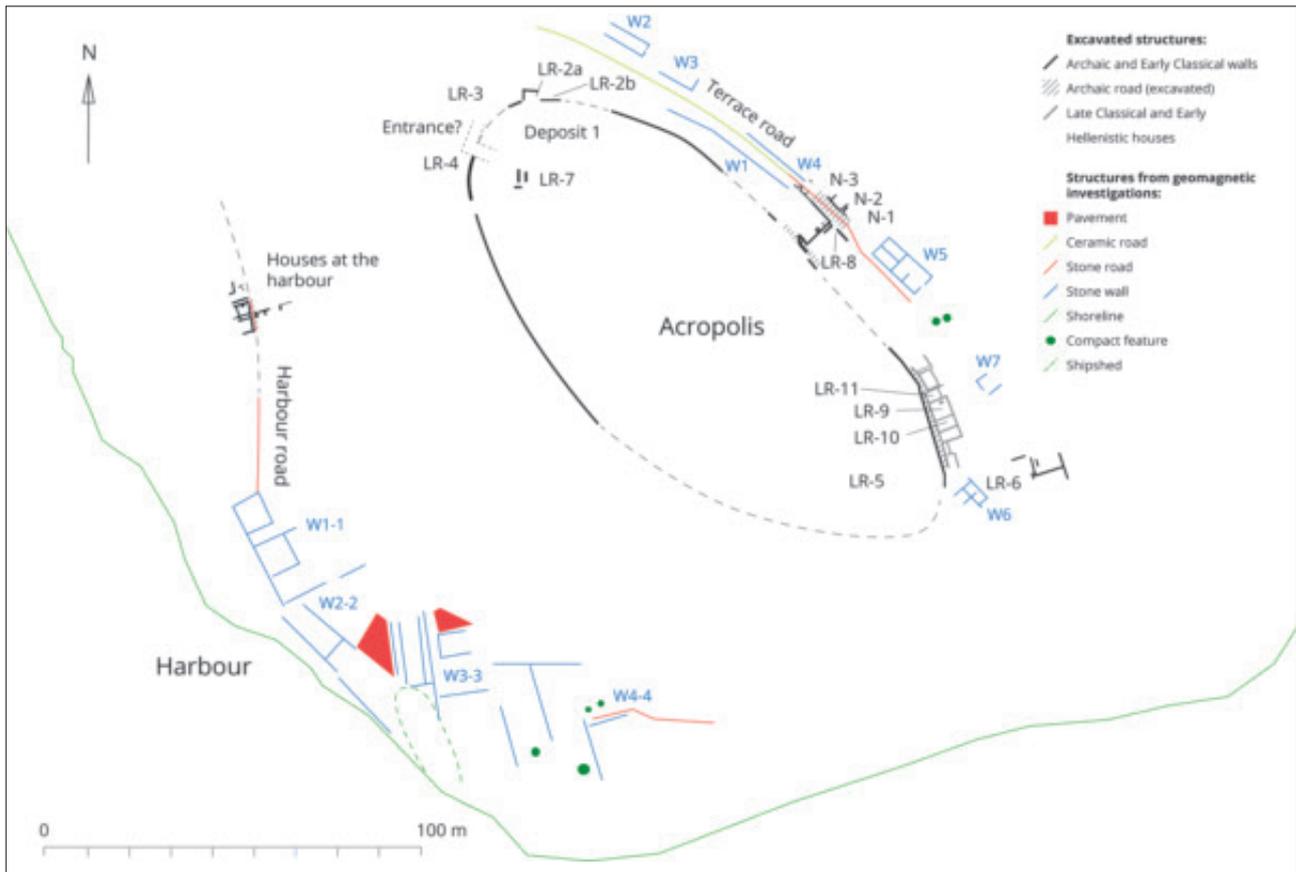


Fig. 8 Excavated Archaic remains of the Houses at the Harbour, at the Terrace Road and on various locations on the hill of Agia Triada in relation to features revealed in geomagnetic studies made in 2014 (based on *Chalkis Aitolias III*, 40 fig. 16 and 43 fig. 19 and structure maps by C. Marinopoulos).

campaigns between 1995 and 2001. The foundation walls of a large Early Christian basilica, Agia Triada, to which the promontory owes its name today, were excavated already in the 1980s and early 1990s. In the course of the Greek-Danish excavations, large sections of an early Byzantine fortification wall, surrounding the basilica and upper plateau, were excavated and measured. The wall was studied by S. Dietz and was seen to roughly follow a predecessor of Archaic date, the so-called “Acropolis Wall”, and in the summer of 2014 a geomagnetic survey was carried out and published by S. Dietz (Fig. 9). Among other important results, this survey confirmed the topography of the shoreline of the ancient harbour as estimated during earlier geological investigations. It also revealed the existence of large buildings along an Archaic road on the eastern terrace (the “Terrace road”), the existence of possible docks and a shipshed on the shore near

the entrance to the harbour.¹⁶ The majority of these buildings were likely to be of Archaic date. On the basis of these investigations it was possible to outline the history of Archaic Chalkis (Fig. 8).¹⁷ The earliest signs of activities dated to the Late Geometric–Early Proto Corinthian period, around 700 BC, and came from the summit of the hill (“acropolis”). Soon after, around 690-680 BC, houses of the courtyard type had been erected all over the hill following rectilinear principles and layout which had close parallels to the earliest Greek-style communities in the west. The

16. The Archaic “Acropolis Wall”: S. Dietz in *Chalkis Aitolias III*, 70-73 and fig. 41, 70-73 with further references; ancient shoreline: K. Strand Petersen in *Chalkis Aitolias III*, 29, fig. 5; geomagnetic survey: T. Smekalov and B. Bevan in *Chalkis Aitolias III*, 33-52.

17. Compare T. Smekalov and B. Bevan in *Chalkis Aitolias III*, 40 fig. 16, 43 fig. 19.