



INSTITUTE OF ARCHEOLOGY
AND ART HISTORY OF ROMANIAN
ACADEMY CLUJ-NAPOCA



UNIVERSITATEA TEHNICĂ
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No. 12-1 / 2025

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ISSN 2360 266x
ISSN-L 2360 266x

Design & layout: Francisc Baja



EDITURA MEGA | www.edituramega.ro
e-mail: mega@edituramega.ro

ANCIENT HISTORY

ANCIENT PHTHIA & MODERN PHARSALUS: LIVES PARALLEL OR OPPOSITE?

Abstract: The ancient cultural heritage and by extension archaeology, play a significant role in shaping the image of Greece, even today. Numerous archaeological sites of great importance remain either undiscovered or unexcavated in the present, one of which is the palace of ancient Phthia. The palace of Peleus and his son, Achilles, form a puzzle for highly skilled solvers concerning its precise location. The paper attempts to identify ancient Phthia with the current town of Pharsalus within a holistic framework, taking into account ancient sources, updated sources from travelers, as well as archaeological data. The discovery of the palace, along with the mythological influence of father and son, has the potential to reshape the perception of the ancient Phthia kingdom in central Greece as a destination for archaeological tourism.

Keywords: *Phthia, Pharsalus, Peleus, Achilles, palace.*

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INTRODUCTION

The aspect of culture and cultural heritage serves as a significant differentiating factor for Greece itself. However, it encompasses more than just this. The target audience possesses notable qualities, as it engages individuals of all ages, encouraging them to explore and experience authentically the remarkable elements of culture that trace back to ancient times. The promotion and integration of these elements is a primary objective for the country, not only in terms of archaeology but also of tourism and geopolitics.¹ The discovery and promotion of the palace of prince Achilles and his father, king Peleus, in the region of Phthia will undoubtedly become a significant symbol of the Greek nation since the caliber of the brand name is immense² and this is about the excavation of the century at least.³ Consequently, it is just a matter of fact that it will attract visitors to the area, thereby generating tourism and contributing to a balanced development.

The clear identification of Achilles' role within the army at Troy stands in stark contrast to the ambiguity surrounding his homeland on the Greek mainland.⁴ Numerous writings have emerged over time regarding the identification of Phthia with Pharsalus. Still, a comprehensive study focusing on the investigation of this particular Mycenaean palace has yet to be conducted, with only a few exceptions.⁵ In recent times, several initiatives have been

¹ SPANOS 2022, 219–220.

² SPANOS 2024A, 524; SPANOS, 2019A, 241; SPANOS, 2019B, 415; SPANOS, 2016, 190–191.

³ MAGGIDIS, 2014.

⁴ MACKIE 2002, 165.

⁵ BRIANAS, 2024.

undertaken to promote the whole region. Firstly, commitments and funding had been secured from the University of Florida in USA as well as local authorities, for excavations in Pharsalus.⁶ Unfortunately, the excavation project has not progressed at all since then. Secondly, a museum dedicated to the legendary hero Achilles is set to be established in Pharsalus, following a decision by the Larissa Prefecture which has fulfilled a long-standing request from the local residents. The “*Achilleian Center for History, Mythology & Culture*” will serve as a virtual reality exhibition space, providing public access to virtual exhibits of places, monuments and individuals that no longer exist but have been brought to light by researchers, architects, historians and archaeologists. Through the use of digital technology, all these images will be displayed in real time rather than as recorded material, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the experience.⁷

The issue regarding Achilles’ homeland lies in the reality that the most esteemed Greek hero is placed in a relatively unremarkable location.⁸ It is evident that Achilles is restricted to a rather inconspicuous region. The underlying argument is that Achilles deserves a homeland that reflects his extraordinary stature within the narrative, as anything less would undermine his significance. In any case, the precise identification of the palace through archaeological excavation will serve as a catalyst for any further development of the whole area and this paper contributes significantly towards that goal, taking into consideration the entire body of literature from antiquity to the present day.

ANCIENT SOURCES

Initially, based on ancient sources, it is demonstrated that the name “*Phthia*” was widely prevalent and Homer is the most appropriate case to begin with. It is reported that during the Trojan War, those who inhabited Pelasgian Argos, Alos, Alope, Trachis, Phthia and Hellas participated under the leadership of Achilles.⁹ This reference by Homer clearly indicates that he makes reference of six cities rather than six territories. In Book 1, Achilles addresses Agamemnon, stating that the Trojans caused him no harm whatsoever; they did not seize his cattle or horses, nor did they devastate his fields in Phthia, a land known for its fertile soil that gives birth to robust men. The essential terms associated with Achilles that warrant emphasis include “*my cattle*”, “*my horses*”, “*Phthia, known for its fertile soil*” and “*my crops*”.¹⁰ In Book 9, which details the embassy to Achilles involving Odysseus, Ajax and Phoenix, Achilles, who takes pride in the devastation he has wrought upon the lands of the Trojan allies, declares in the presence of Patroclus, “*As I have no inclination to confront the illustrious Hector, I shall set sail at dawn tomorrow after making sacrifices to Zeus and the other gods. On the third day, we will reach the fertile, dark soil of Phthia. There lies my fortune, abundant treasures – and even more riches beyond that*”. The significant phrase here is “*the*

fertile, dark rich soil of Phthia”.¹¹ Also in Book 9, Phoenix, who hailed from Hellas, the homeland of his father Amyntor and grandfather Ormenus, recounts to Achilles his departure, following a conflict with his father. He states, “*I fled across the vast expanse of Hellas, and upon reaching the fertile land of Phthia, known for its rich soil and abundance of livestock, I was graciously received by king Peleus*”. The significant phrases in this context are “*the dark fertile land of Phthia*” and “*mother of sheep*”, focusing on the ancient Greek word “*επιβόλαξ*” which means “*fertile*”, “*with thick soil*”.¹² This word is used seven times for Troy,¹³ twice for Paeonia,¹⁴ Thrace,¹⁵ Larissa of Asia Minor,¹⁶ once for Ascania,¹⁷ Lycia,¹⁸ Tarni¹⁹ and three times for Phthia.²⁰ The conclusion drawn from this excerpt is that the only city or region of the Achaeans that launched an expedition to Troy and is mentioned in the catalogue of the ships, characterized in this manner, is only Phthia itself. Homer not only dismisses the existence of the city of Phthia in mountainous and barren regions but also emphasizes, through the exclusive use of this term that Phthia is situated in the area with the largest and most fertile plain of his time – an assertion that remains valid to this day – specifically referring to Thessaly.

In Book 1, Achilles, during his quarrel with Agamemnon, makes a reference to mountains shrouded in deep shadows and turbulent seas, situated between his homeland and Troy.²¹ Indeed, between Pharsalus and Troy, there are mountains such as Othrys and further north within the mainland of Thessaly, Mount Chalkodonian, Mount Pelion and Mount Ossa. Another observation that should not be overlooked is Homer’s depiction of Achilles’ shield.²² Objectively, this is a description that directly refers to a prosperous city, situated in a vast and fertile plain which again, aligns with the region of Thessaly. To support this perspective, one can observe Achilles’ defiant stance towards Agamemnon, as the son of Peleus has previously visited Mycenae.²³ Evaluating the demigod’s attitude towards Agamemnon, it is likely that what he observed in Mycenae did not particularly impress him to the extent that he would acknowledge the clear superiority of Mycenae over Phthia.²⁴ The sense of superiority that Achilles holds over Agamemnon is evident from the very first lines of the Iliad. When the seer Calchas implores Achilles to protect him from Agamemnon’s wrath, as his prophecy may not be well-received, the son of Thetis concludes his statement by asserting that while Agamemnon boasts of being the best, he is clearly not as such, in the eyes of Achilles.²⁵ Achilles’ sense of superiority over Agamemnon arises not solely from his strength or his overall background but also from the

⁶ ARCHAEOLOGY NEWSROOM 2008.

⁷ ARCHAEOLOGY NEWSROOM 2010.

⁸ PAGE 1959, 126.

⁹ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 116.

¹⁰ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 67.

¹¹ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 315.

¹² MAVROPOULOS 2004, 319.

¹³ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 141, 146, 236, 314, 530, 593, 773.

¹⁴ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 569, 679.

¹⁵ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 369, 659.

¹⁶ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 121, 567.

¹⁷ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 443.

¹⁸ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 564.

¹⁹ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 186.

²⁰ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 67, 315, 318.

²¹ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 67.

²² MAVROPOULOS 2004, 606–608.

²³ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 317.

²⁴ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 67, 69.

²⁵ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 65.

significance of the kingdom of Phthia that he represents. Such a kingdom could only exist in the most fertile plains of Greece and more specifically, in Thessaly.

Considering the cities governed by Peleus as listed in the catalogue of ships, Homer states, “those who inhabited the Pelasgian Argos, those who exploited Alos, Alope, Trachis and those who possessed Phthia and Hellas”.²⁶ It is likely that the kingdom of Peleus exerted influence and authority in the north, extending from Mount Ossa in Thessaly (there is a close connection of Peleus with these mountains) and in the south, reaching the Spercheius River, the Thermopylae and Locris.²⁷ The initial argument lies in Achilles’ response to the delegation that approaches him in an attempt to persuade him to rejoin the war. The hero replies that there are numerous Achaean women in Phthia and Hellas who are daughters of distinguished men, who in turn, govern small cities.²⁸ This indicates that in the Achaea of Homer, within the kingdom of Peleus, there are other kings in cities that are certainly of lesser power than Phthia and Hellas, where Achilles’ superiority is so pronounced that he could marry the daughter of any of them. The expansion of Phthia to the west is evident, as Phoenix became the king of the Dolopians due to Peleus, at the edge of Phthia.²⁹ The same should apply to the eastern region of Phthia, consistently as a city. It is not a coincidence that Podarces³⁰ and Protesilaus³¹ are called Phthiotians and in their region, there were later locations with names such as Phthiotic Thebes and Achaean Phthiotis. Other cases of such kings are Eumelos from Pherai,³² Philoctetes from Melivoia³³ (Mounts Ossa and Pelion), Podaleirius and Machaon from Trikki,³⁴ Eurypylus from Ormenion,³⁵ Polypoitis from Argissa,³⁶ Gouneus from Perraiia³⁷ and Prothoos from Pelion and Pineios River.³⁸ Regarding the northern part of ancient Thessaly – Perraiia – the prayer of Achilles to the Dodonian Pelasgian Zeus of Perraiia is not by accident.³⁹ Concerning the southern part of Phthia, the prayer of Peleus to the river god Spercheius is not coincidental as well.⁴⁰ It is also not a coincidence that Strabo calls Eurypylus, Philoctetes and Protesilaus as “Phthiotians”, having Phthia beginning from Mount Pindos (Pineios River) and ending up to Mount Oeta (Thermopylae).⁴¹ The inhabitants of the territorial regions used to relocate within the Thessalian plain, between the northern and southern sides of Mount Othrys, as well as between the eastern and western sides of Mount Pindus, navigating the spaces between the plains and the mountains.⁴² The connection between Phthia and Thessaly

will be further demonstrated through references from other sources, as will be discussed shortly.

Another key point is that, when discussing Peleus and Achilles, Homer begins with the “Pelasgian Argos”. The word “Argos” in ancient Greek language is used for a place which has to do with plains and thus, if Pelasgian Argos could be identified with a city, that would be Larissa, in central Thessaly.⁴³ Typically, this particular word is accompanied by the adjective “ἵπποβότοιο”⁴⁴ which has to do with horses that thrive in fertile soil. There is a significant likelihood that the Thessalian plain is implied from Larissa (beneath Perraiia) to the Pherai (modern Velestino). It should not be overlooked that the name of Thessaly prior to the arrival of the Thessalians was “Pelasgia” while the aforementioned plain was designated by the Thessalian conquerors as “Pelasgiotis”.⁴⁵

Phthia, as described by Homer, is a fertile region suitable for agriculture and crop cultivation. This land is characterized not only by its flat terrain, comprising expansive valleys but also by its dark, rich black soil. Additionally, it serves as a habitat for horses and a breeding ground for cattle, providing ample grazing areas. The landscape includes hills that support livestock feeding and a plain that offers shelter during the winter months. However, Homer – though he ignores the name Pharsalus – is not the only one dealing with Phthia.

According to the “Argonautica” of Orpheus, Peleus ruled over the Dolopes in the prosperous region of Phthia.⁴⁶ Hesiod refers to the “city of Myrmidons” two times, nearby Antheia, Arni, Eliki and Iolcus, ancient cities put in Magnesia.⁴⁷ He also mentions that Peleus came to Phthia bringing wealth from the spacious Iolcus⁴⁸ and in another passage, he places Phthia near the Pineios River⁴⁹ in Thessaly. This is a designation that might be cautious to interpret literally, understanding Pineios River instead as its southern tributaries, specifically the Pineios basin. This interpretation aligns with Strabo’s assertion that the region extended towards the territory of the Asclepiads, particularly the western areas. Consequently, Phthia was adapted to correspond with the later Hestiaeotis.⁵⁰ Phthia is underlined by Pindar as the location where the immortal Thetis gave birth to Achilles⁵¹ and it is described as the realm she rules.⁵² Besides, Peleus was regarded as the most pious man among those nurtured in the plains of Iolcus, thus highlighting his connection to this particular part of Thessaly.⁵³ Additionally, Peleus is associated with Iolcus, having conquered it⁵⁴, making thus Phthia a more important Mycenaean center than Iolcus with more power.

Apollonius recounts many times the name “Phthia”. The Argonaut Aithalides was born to Eupolemeia of Phthia, the

²⁶ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 116.

²⁷ JONES 2001, 394; LOPTSON 1981, 136–138.

²⁸ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 316.

²⁹ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 318.

³⁰ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 440.

³¹ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 117.

³² MAVROPOULOS 2004, 117.

³³ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 117.

³⁴ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 118.

³⁵ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 118.

³⁶ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 118.

³⁷ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 118.

³⁸ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 118.

³⁹ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 523.

⁴⁰ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 733.

⁴¹ JONES 2001, 396, 407.

⁴² HODKINSON 1990, 142–143.

⁴³ JONES 2001, 402.

⁴⁴ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 632.

⁴⁵ SPANOS 2024B, 7.

⁴⁶ MAVROPOULOS 2011, 95.

⁴⁷ SKARTSIS 1993, 185, 191.

⁴⁸ LEKATSAS 1941, 256.

⁴⁹ LEKATSAS 1941, 272.

⁵⁰ ALLEN 1921, 119.

⁵¹ MAVROPOULOS 2008, 133.

⁵² MAVROPOULOS 2008, 425.

⁵³ ROUSSOS 2001, 329.

⁵⁴ MAVROPOULOS 2008, 427.

daughter of Myrmidon.⁵⁵ Peleus himself moved to the fertile region of Phthia to settle there after being exiled from Aegina.⁵⁶ Apollo takes his son Aristaeus to Chiron, where the Muses appointed him as the guardian of the flocks grazing in the Athamantian plain of Phthia, near the rocky Othrys and the sacred waters of the Apidanus River.⁵⁷ Apollodorus states that Peleus, after leaving Aegina, sought refuge in Phthia whose king was Eurytion; he purified and granted him his daughter, Antigone, as a wife, along with one-third of his kingdom.⁵⁸ At this point, the author asserts that, regardless of how beloved and esteemed figure Peleus may had been, the one-third of the kingdom granted to him by his father-in-law could not be situated in the heart of the realm but rather at its periphery, specifically in the region of Pharsalus. This assertion is further supported by the writings of the aforementioned and following sources, where the Apidanus River plays a central role, currently associated with Pharsalus, as well as Iolcus, a region with which Peleus appears to have a particular connection, as explained above.

The “*Scholium on Pindar’s Pythian*” from “*Catalogue of Women*” pertains to the victory odes from the “*Pythian Games*” held at Delphi. The text notes that Pindar drew upon the narrative found in Hesiod’s “*Ehoiai*” (Catalogue of Women), beginning with the line which suggests that in Phthia, endowed with beauty from the Graces, beside the waters of the Pineios River, resided the lovely Cyrene. Although it does not specify the city of Phthia, it does indicate a region known as Phthia which encompasses the central area of Thessaly surrounding the Pineios River.⁵⁹ In his “*Hymn IV*” to Delos, he traverses Thessaly, pinpointing locations such as Larisa, Pelion, Ossa and Pindus. He addresses the Pineios River with the word “*Phthiotian*” and this serves as a clear allusion to the Thessalian plain.⁶⁰ Philostratus notes that various incidents are discussed regarding Phthia and Phylake, in the Pagasetic Gulf, known to all residents of Thessaly⁶¹ while Achilles was fortunate to be celebrated annually by the Thessalians at his tomb.⁶² Thucydides records that those who ventured to Troy with Achilles, hailing from Phthia, as well as those descended from Deucalion were referred to as Hellenes,⁶³ portraying the space of Othrys and southern Thessaly. In the Homeric era, the term “*Hellas*” referred to the southwestern part of what would later become Thessaly which was a part of ancient Phthia and this region was under the rule of king Peleus.⁶⁴ Besides, it was well known in ancient Greece that the name of the entire country originated from Thessaly.⁶⁵ Furthermore, when Alexander the Great conquered Thessaly, he did not treat Phthia in the same manner; instead, he dedicated it to Achilles.⁶⁶

In the epic “*Little Iliad*”, Andromache and Aeneas are

transported to the homeland of Achilles, which is Pharsalus;⁶⁷ this is the first time – until now at least – that Phthia and Pharsalus are identified. Pherecydes, in his account regarding “*Thetideion*”, stated that Peleus traveled to Phthia while transporting Thetis on horses. He resided in Pharsalus which is referred to as “*Thetideion*”, named after Thetis and is recognized as a city.⁶⁸ This excerpt is frequently mentioned as evidence for a potential connection and identification between Phthia and Pharsalus.⁶⁹ Strabo also concurs that the Thetideion is situated adjacent to Pharsalus.⁷⁰

Agamestor of Pharsalus argues that Achilles was initially called “*Pyrisous*” in the epithalamium of Thetis. The mother named her son as such but Peleus chose to call him “*Achilles*” with a single “*l*”, as he found the child lying in the dust and, without uttering a word, wiped the burning lip clean.⁷¹ He does not deal with the identification of Phthia and Pharsalus, as he obviously takes it for granted. Additional references can be found in the works of Callimachus. In chapter 19 “*The Description of Thessaly*” of “*Cath Catharda: The Civil War of the Romans*” – the author is unknown – is noticed that in Thessaly, numerous cities exist within it, including Pharsalus, the city associated with Achilles, the son of Peleus and Phylake, where the Argo was constructed. This ship was the one utilized by Jason, the son of Aeson, in his quest for the Golden Fleece in the country of the Colchis.⁷²

(Pseudo)-Dicaearchus, in his work “*Description of Greece*” informs that in ancient times, Hellas was a city that was named and established by Hellen, the son of Aeolus, within the region of Thessaly, situated between Pharsalus and the city of Melitaeans while the term “*Myrmidons*” refers to the inhabitants of Phthia in Thessaly.⁷³ Antipater of Sidon notes that in the plains of Troy, the body of Hector was being torn apart by the horses of Achilles from Pharsalus.⁷⁴ Pausanias specifies that an ancient Olympian, Theagenes, competes in the “*Dolichos*” (a long-distance running event) to honor Achilles himself, in Phthia of Thessaly.⁷⁵ He also observed dedications from the people of Pharsalus at the Oracle of Delphi, dedicated to Achilles as their own hero, while their presence in Delphi is further highlighted by the tomb of Neoptolemus, son of Achilles.⁷⁶ It is noteworthy that neither in his two works nor in these two significant centers of Hellenism (Olympia-Delphi) does Pausanias mention any other Greek city apart from Pharsalus, which is associated with dedications to Achilles. From his perspective, Heliodorus expresses a question regarding how an individual from the tribe of the Ainianes, who inhabited the region along the Maliakos Gulf, could claim to be a descendant of Achilles, especially when Homer identifies Phthia as the hero’s homeland.⁷⁷ Thus, there is an indirect connection noted here with the area of Pharsalus.

⁵⁵ CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM 1999A, 33.

⁵⁶ CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM 1999A, 35.

⁵⁷ CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM 1999A, 151.

⁵⁸ CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM 1999B, 87.

⁵⁹ BRIANAS 2011, 16–17.

⁶⁰ MAIR 1921, 95.

⁶¹ MANDILARAS 1995, 79.

⁶² MANDILARAS 1995, 199.

⁶³ GIAGKOPOULOS 2005, 83.

⁶⁴ BURY 1895, 225.

⁶⁵ TATARAKI 1992A, 141.

⁶⁶ MANDILARAS 1995, 205.

⁶⁷ ALLEN 1921, 119.

⁶⁸ FOWLER 2000, 272; THOMAS 1989, 161.

⁶⁹ HOPE-SIMPSON/LAZENBY 1970, 126–132; VISSNER 1997, 655.

⁷⁰ JONES 2001, 404.

⁷¹ CAMERON 2004, 152.

⁷² CORPUS OF ELECTRONIC TEXTS 2024

⁷³ ATHANASIOU 2009, 90–91.

⁷⁴ DUBNER 1888, 273.

⁷⁵ TATARAKI 1992B, 235.

⁷⁶ TATARAKI 1992C, 87–89, 149.

⁷⁷ CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM 2002, 203.

A special remark must be made about Euripides due to the multitude of his works that pertain to this particular subject. A valid argument is that the widespread dissemination of the Iliad during classical antiquity, along with its popularity and the trust it garnered from its audience, would not have permitted historical or geographical deviations and glaring inaccuracies. In the tragedy *Hecuba*, it is noted that the land of Phthia is made fertile by the river Apidanus, which is the river of Pharsalus.⁷⁸ In the tragedy *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Clytemnestra inquires of Agamemnon regarding the city in Greece where Achilles resides, to which the response focuses on the Apidanus River, located in the mountains of Phthia.⁷⁹ The river of Pharsalus is much more than meets the eye. In the Iliad, there is a clear reference to a different Styx that is not associated with Mount Chelmos in the Peloponnese but rather with the Pineios River and the Titarisius River in Thessaly.⁸⁰ In terms of spatial distribution within mainland Greece, the Underworld of Hades encompassed a vast area, extending from Cape Tainaron in the Peloponnese to the Acheron River in Epirus. Styx, along with four other rivers, was the principal sacred river of the realm of Hades, flowing throughout Greece from one end to the other. Occasionally, when its waters emerged from the rocks onto the land, these waters were referred to as the *Waters of Styx*. Over time, this designation became predominantly associated with Mount Chelmos, leading to the conclusion that the narrative of Thetis immersing Achilles in the Apidanus River to render him invulnerable was ultimately overshadowed. This perspective is further supported by the fact that Euripides depicts the Apidanus River as possessing healing properties.⁸¹

Achilles, upon encountering Clytemnestra, exclaims that he has left his homeland Pharsalus and his father, Peleus.⁸² In the tragedy *Andromache*, the homonymous captive speaks briefly of *Phthia*, *city of Pharsalus* and *Thetideion* from the very beginning, specifically in lines 16–23.⁸³ This section outlines various interpretative challenges that both engage and facilitate the comprehension of the nature of Thetideion. In this context, lines 19–20 serve as a crucial excerpt due to two factors. First, the pronoun *nin* which pertains to the *synchorta pedia*. Second, Thetideion, the designation assigned to the same pedia by the populace.⁸⁴ The third person accusative pronoun in Doric corresponds to the ionic and epic forms *min* and the attic *auton* or *auten*.⁸⁵ In the framework of tragedy, *nin* serves as both a masculine and feminine form, applicable in singular and plural contexts, though it is less frequently used as a neuter plural accusative.⁸⁵

Second, at line 20, Andromache explicitly identifies the location of the drama. *Thetideion*, a name bestowed by the Thessalian people upon the *synchorta pedia* where she resides, commemorating the marriage of Peleus and Thetis. Notably, this is the sole reference to *Thetideion* in the entire

tragedy; in other instances, the characters who appear do not bring it up, instead speaking only of *Phthia*. Therefore, there appears to be a clear connection among *Thetideion*, *Phthia* and *Pharsalus*. To gain a deeper understanding of this relationship, it is essential to revisit lines 16–17, particularly focusing on the significance of the term *synchorta*. If the two genitives in line 16 are associated with *pedia*, the translation ought to read: *I reside in the adjacent plains of this Phthia and the city of Pharsalus* indicating that the plains, characterized by pastures, would be situated between Phthia and Pharsalus. Nevertheless, if one takes into account the significance and the lack of absolute applications of the term *synchorta*, meaning the adjective used in isolation without additional cases or modifiers, it becomes considerably more challenging to elucidate its grammatical function and placement within the context of lines 16–17. Conversely, should the two genitives in line 16 be linked to *synchorta*, the appropriate translation would be: *I reside in the plains that adjoin this Phthia and the city of Pharsalus*; thus, there would be no overlap between the locations but rather they would simply be adjacent. This hypothesis is supported by its own reasoning, particularly regarding the parallel found in another tragedy by Euripides, as well as the observation that the synonyms of *synchorta* are primarily used with the dative case, though they can also be associated with the genitive case.⁸⁶

The *synchorta pedia*, specifically *Thetideion*, serves as the backdrop for the play.⁸⁷ It is crucial to emphasize that Phthia ought to be regarded as a metropolis for sure. In other words, Euripides addresses the issue of ambiguity and uncertainty regarding whether Phthia was classified as a city or a region. It is reasonable to infer that Euripides regarded Phthia as both a region and a city, particularly when considering Thetideion as the setting of the play and the frequent references to Phthia and its territory separately throughout the tragedy. It is also probable that the area of Pharsalus was encompassed that time within the territory or dominion of Phthia and thus, Phthia was something like a metropolis.

Continuing, Catullus cites that during the weddings of Peleus and Thetis, the entirety of Thessaly gathered at his residence, transforming the palace into a vibrant assembly of joy, as they arrived with their offerings and expressions of happiness. Kieros stands abandoned, they depart from Thessalian Tempi, the abode of Crannon, and the fortifications of Larissa, converging instead at Pharsalus, where they fill the courts with their presence.⁸⁸ Statius speaks of Achilles, under the vigilant gaze of his mother Thetis, who journeys as a child and young man across eastern Thessaly (ancient Haemonia). His travels extend from Mount Pelion in the far east to the Mount Ossa near Tempi in the north, passing through Pharsalus and the Mount Othrys range.⁸⁹ Considering that Pelion was part of the territory of Peleus, the spear made of the melia tree which Achilles used during the Trojan War, may have represented a form of vassalage to him.⁹⁰ Lucanus depicts the achievements of Caesar

⁷⁸ ROUSSOS 1991, 65.

⁷⁹ GEORGIOUSOPOULOS 1992, 83.

⁸⁰ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 118.

⁸¹ ROUSSOS 1991, 64.

⁸² GEORGIOUSOPOULOS 1992, 91.

⁸³ ROUSSOS 1993, 43–45.

⁸⁴ MARIANI 2018, 152.

⁸⁵ KUHNER/BLASS 1890, 592; JOHANSEN/WHITTLE 1980, 729; STOCKERT 1992, 327, 552.

⁸⁶ MARIANI 2018, 153.

⁸⁷ LLOYD 2005, 10; ALLAN 2000, 49.

⁸⁸ UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA 2007, 15.

⁸⁹ CAREY 2004.

⁹⁰ SHEWAN, 1916, 184–186.

across a significant portion of Europe. Following Caesar's crossing from Italy into Greece in the distant region of Epirus, he engages in conflict with his adversary Pompey. Subsequently, he retreats towards Thessaly, traversing Aeginium (Kalambaka) and after raiding Gomphi, he proceeds eastward. Lucanus further notes Pharsalus, the sea-born Achilles' home.⁹¹

Going back in time for a different item, Aeatus, the son of Pheidippus, launched a campaign against the Boeotians residing in ancient Thessaly, particularly in Arni.⁹² He ruled alongside Polykleia and they had a son named Thessalos, from whom Thessaly derived its name.⁹³ Here, it is essential to examine a notable similarity between the terms "*Boeotia*" and "*Phthia*". Homer ignores the name "*Thessalia*" since the Thessalians arrive in Thessaly sixty years after the fall of Troy, driving the Boeotians from Arne and it is only then that they name the region as such. The poet overlooks the Thessalians because they have not yet settled in the area during the time referenced.⁹⁴ The Pelasgian Argos of Homeric poetry corresponds to the Trojan narratives of mythological prehistory. According to the linguistic characteristics of the Aeolic dialect of ancient Greek language, the "β-" (*b-*) sound transforms into "φ-" (*ph-*) and the "τ-" (*t-*) sound changes to "θ-" (*th-*),⁹⁵ transforming "*Boeotia*" to "*Phthia*".

Achaea Phthiotis was regarded as part of Thessalian territory when the Greeks dispatched a fleet to the region. They left their ships and initially headed towards the Tempi Valley in order to confront Xerxes.⁹⁶ When the Spartan king Agesilaus decisively defeated the Thessalians, who were allies of the Thebans and with the fall of Polycharmus, the cavalry commander of the Pharsalians, he erected a trophy just outside of Pharsalus, at Narthaki.⁹⁷ The connection between Pharsalus and Thetideion with Thessaly is evidenced also during the era of the Theban general, Pelopidas.⁹⁸ The Pharsalus region is considered part of Thessaly when the Greek king Philip II seeks to conquer the Phthiotian Thebes.⁹⁹ One argument that may be considered of lesser importance, yet remains valid, is the immortality of Achilles' horses, Balius and Xanthus.¹⁰⁰ Their immortality means a quality which is not common and whose origin is not accidental. There is a necessity of vast plains for horses, which undoubtedly require such expansive spaces to thrive and gallop. The Thessalian cavalry has been renowned for its quality since the time of Alexander the Great, with particular mention made of the Pharsalian horses.¹⁰¹ It is noteworthy that this specific breed of horses is currently facing the risk of extinction. Considering all the above, there is no evidence to suggest that the ancient Greeks expressed any disagreement

regarding the connection between Pharsalus and Thessaly, in any form.

UPDATED SOURCES

It seems that the town was primarily recognized by Europeans for the historical battles involving Philip V and Flaminius in 197 BC and the conflict between Caesar and Pompey in 48 BC. Those foreign travelers who explored mainland Greece inevitably passed through Pharsalus. This holds significantly greater importance as, in comparison, those who visited mainland Greece were fewer than those who toured Athens, the Peloponnese, Constantinople and the islands of the Ionian and Aegean Seas, primarily because maritime travel was more organized at that time. Its geographical location and the prestige of its significant historical past were two primary reasons that led numerous visitors over the last two centuries to come, stay and document their experiences in Pharsalus. The location was deemed advantageous by Greece's post-war development programs and expert researchers suggested relocating the capital to Pharsalus. Factors related to transportation, production and spatial planning, supported this choice.¹⁰²

A first testimony can be found in Procopius, where the course of the Pineios River is associated with Phthia.¹⁰³ Stephanus of Byzantium uses the name "*Pharralos*", a name which is not found anywhere else.¹⁰⁴ The succession of Phthia from Pharsalus is also agreed upon by Eustathius of Thessalonica,¹⁰⁵ who is perhaps the foremost commentator on Homeric works throughout the ages.¹⁰⁶ Eduard Brown, in 1669, reported that the inhabitants were renowned for their exceptional horsemanship and that the region was home to remarkable horses. The French consul, Jean Gireaud, merely passed through the area in 1674 while the merchant Paul Lucas did the same in 1705 and again in 1714. In 1779, Jac Bjornstahl, a Swedish lecturer at Uppsala University, described the feeding of stork chicks with locusts. The Frenchmen Fauvel and Foucherot arrived in 1780 at the behest of the traveler Gouffier, who had visited two years earlier and had them as his assistants, capturing landscapes and people during their journey. Felix Beanjour, the French consul, provided an account in 1797 regarding trade, craftsmanship, agriculture and the dyeing of wool and cotton. Adolf Sturrenbecke, the chaplain of the Swedish embassy, succumbed to a severe illness in 1784. John Tueddel passed away in 1799 due to malaria. Eduard Clarke, a Doctor (PhD) from Cambridge, accompanied by the French painter Dreux, published three volumes in 1801 detailing his travels in Greece at the age of 30. Notably, he does not mention anything significant about Pharsalus. Similarly, the Prussian scholar Jacob Bartoldy who was knowledgeable in Greek and an archaeologist, yet held a disdain for Greeks and a preference for Turks, also fails to reference anything important for the city in his writings, in 1803.¹⁰⁷ The English archaeologist

⁹¹ MEDIEVAL & CLASSICAL LITERATURE LIBRARY 2024.

⁹² MANDILARAS 1994, 391.

⁹³ MANDILARAS 1994, 169–171.

⁹⁴ GOUNARIS 2012, 252.

⁹⁵ ATHANASIOU 2009, 146–147.

⁹⁶ SPYROPOULOS 1993, 313.

⁹⁷ CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM 1993A, 63–65; VLACHAKOS 2003, 137.

⁹⁸ KALOPOULOS 1993, 101–103.

⁹⁹ TRIANTAFYLLOPOULOS 1998, 179.

¹⁰⁰ MAVROPOULOS 2004, 634.

¹⁰¹ CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM 1993B, 113–115.

¹⁰² KARAMANOLIS 1992, 193–194.

¹⁰³ HELLY ET AL. 2001, 145.

¹⁰⁴ ALEKSOPOULOS 1986, 18.

¹⁰⁵ STALLBAUM 1827, 60.

¹⁰⁶ FENOGLIO 2010, 25–59.

¹⁰⁷ KARAMANOLIS 1992, 196–197.

Eduard Dodwell documented the contemporary situation between 1801 and 1805. In 1805, William Gell, a graduate of Cambridge, observed numerous camels while the English traveler William Hangarth, during his journey from 1810 to 1811, described the local inhabitants as lethargic individuals whose understanding of their own history was incomplete, vague and muddled. Similarly, the Estonian baron Otto Magnus Stackelberg contributed just for the present of Pharsalus, in 1811 as well as Eduard Holland, a member of the London Academy.¹⁰⁸

It is also noted that a bishop, although articulate on matters of general interest due to his prolonged residence in Constantinople, was entirely lacking in knowledge of ancient literature and history. He was unaware that the modern name of the city from which he derives his title, with minimal alteration, is the same name that the city has carried since ancient times, throughout the long succession of centuries. He assumed that inscribed marbles indicated hidden treasures, and of all the ancient names, only Thessaly and Phthia appeared to be familiar to him.¹⁰⁹ Pharsalus is noted as the seat of the Bishop of Phanari and Exarch of all Phthia, during the Byzantine era.¹¹⁰

Westlake talks about a magnificent steep rock with a double, saddle-shaped peak rises very abruptly from the plain and forms a citadel so inaccessible that if it were not for treachery often undermining its defensive strength, it would have remained impregnable in ancient times. The natural defense was reinforced by strong walls, some sections of which are still preserved.¹¹¹ Thus, until the mid-5th century BC, Pharsalus had the ability to withstand long sieges. Goodell points out that on the acropolis with the two peaks, there are walls that date back to the time of Homer and surely Euripides thought that this would be the homeland of Achilles, the acropolis of Phthia.¹¹² Even without the historical evidence, the preserved walls tell that there was once a very important city here. The acropolis became increasingly inaccessible from the rear cliff, which protected it from attacks. There is a general view that Pharsalus in antiquity was called Phthia and was the homeland of Achilles.¹¹³

The entire acropolis is 4,570m long and besides that, the Cyclopean walls were always visible.¹¹⁴ Traveler Leake accredits that on one side of the northern gate, the ancient masonry was made with irregularly shaped boulders and smaller stones in the intermediate spaces, as in Tiryns. In the latest ruins, the boulders are larger. A monument from the very early period in the middle of the acropolis, which was destroyed along with the ruins of the Cyclopean walls and all the other ruins of the acropolis, reinforces the view that this was Phthia of the Trojan War, a populous and powerful city.¹¹⁵ That Pharsalus, as well as its province, was called Phthia in an earlier era is not an unreasonable assumption. The Tetrapolis of Phthiotis included the entire area surrounded by the plains of Apidanus and Spercheius, the

Euboean and Pagasetic Gulf, and a line that started from there towards the Enipeus River, at its exit from the mountains, thus encompassing the regions of Pharsalus, Proerna, Thaumakos, and Lamia, as well as the area around Mount Othrys, which in later times seems to have specifically constituted Phthiotis. In this entire region, there was no place that could compare to Pharsalus in terms of the combination of strength, resources, and comfort.¹¹⁶

Paul Monceaux considers that the metropolis was built on an ancient wall and found a wide slab that formed the base of a statue of Homer while Cristof Wordworth points out the excellent view from the acropolis of Pharsalus.¹¹⁷ The heroic martyr of the Greek epic of 1821, Rigas Pheraios, also places Phthia in Pharsalus.¹¹⁸ According to the Homeric Dictionary, Phthia is described as the ancient city of Thessaly, the capital of the Myrmidons and the residence of Peleus, despite the noted divergence from the position being discussed here.¹¹⁹ Wilamowitz, the Hellenist scholar, argues that Phthia is connected to Thessaly and in particular, to the region of Othrys.¹²⁰ Decourt also expresses the opinion that Phthia and Pharsalus are identical.¹²¹

The most significant scholar of Pharsalus is perhaps Friedrich Stählin who in the beginning, assumes that the relatively good preservation of ancient remnants is attributed to the city's minor significance during the Middle Ages. These Thessalians relocated their residence from the prehistoric hill of the plain to the impressive mountain that rises 200m above the ground. This mountain consists of two peaks that have a nearly flat shape and are surrounded by steep rocky elevations, along with a ridge that connects these two peaks. The walls here are constructed from meticulously assembled polygonal blocks, one of which measures 2.33m in length and 0.9m in height. Later, they were repaired with rectangular stones and covered by Byzantine structures. Furthermore, in the upper town, on a small plateau, there likely existed the site of the ancient theater, of which no surface remnants have been preserved.¹²² He also records that one can observe on this mountain with its two peaks, the location of Phthia and it is evident that Pharsalus has always belonged to Thessaly. The strength of the city was founded on its dominance over the plain and mountainous region of Achaean Phthiotis which continued to be exercised from the site of the ancient suburb of Phthia.¹²³ Later, the Thessalian conquerors distinguished the fertile plain of Pharsalus as the Tetras Phthiotis and rendered the mountainous region of Achaean Phthiotis which was not Thessalian, a subordinate area. For this reason, authors from the 5th to the 2nd century BC differentiate the Thessalian region of Tetras Phthiotis from the area of the "perioikoi", known as Achaean Phthiotis.¹²⁴ The existence of a sanctuary dedicated to Asclepius further illustrates, alongside all the aforementioned points, the significance of

¹⁰⁸ KARAMANOLIS 1992, 201–203.

¹⁰⁹ KARATOLIAS 2003, 71.

¹¹⁰ GRAPSITIS 2005, 25.

¹¹¹ WESTLAKE 1998, 10.

¹¹² GOODELL 1997, 288.

¹¹³ USSING 2003, 78–79.

¹¹⁴ POMANDI 2006, 47.

¹¹⁵ LEAKE 2001, 40.

¹¹⁶ LEAKE 2000, 132.

¹¹⁷ KARAMANOLIS 1992, 204.

¹¹⁸ KARAMPEROPOULOS 2008, 169.

¹¹⁹ PANTAZIDOU 1888, 667.

¹²⁰ WILAMOWITZ 1931, 66.

¹²¹ DECOURT 1990, 206.

¹²² STAHLIN, 2008, 248.

¹²³ STAHLIN, 2008, 245.

¹²⁴ STAHLIN, 2008, 243.

the city of Pharsalus in ancient times¹²⁵ (somewhere near the Asclepieion, is the second possible place of the ancient theater mentioned above). In total, with a view towards the ancient landscape, the location possesses the finest attributes for an ancient Greek city or a well-fortified settlement. With these on-site advantages and one of the most fertile plains in Greece, Phthia and Pharsalus reached the pinnacle among the cities of Thessaly and became some of the largest cities of ancient Greece, as evidenced by the ruins of their walls. At this point, the author suggests, following a logical framework, that Phthia is a predecessor of a city with similar dynamics in ancient times, such as Pharsalus, within the context of continuity.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The Mycenaean civilization had a limited influence in Thessaly, except for the areas of Iolcus and Phthia.¹²⁶ For this reason, Pharsalus is placed in a distinct category alongside Mycenae, Orchomenos, Amyclae, Tiryns, Pylos and other Mycenaean centers.¹²⁷ The fertile valley of the Enipeus River and the secure elevations surrounding it played a crucial role in the settlement of the area during the later Neolithic period and subsequently, there was an establishment during the Mycenaean era.¹²⁸ Numerous studies conducted by the archaeologist N. Giannopoulos, along with the significant location of Pharsalus between the North and the South of Greece, as well as its proximity to the Pagasetic Gulf, led him to conclude that the city's name is delivered as Phthia and later, as Pharsalus.¹²⁹

Evidence of habitation from the Mycenaean period has been found on the Chtouri hill, located northwest of the city of Pharsalus, as well as within the city itself.¹³⁰ The oldest trace of habitation in this place has been identified archaeologically in the mid-7th millennium BC, in a Neolithic village built at the southern edge of the Pharsalus plain, 5km southeast of the present city, on the outskirts of the modern village of Achilleion. The beginning of the thread of the city's history goes back to the 4th millennium BC and since then, the city has been moving ceaselessly through the cycle of time, carrying the fate of a very important place. From the horizon of the Neolithic settlement, only a few ceramic finds have remained, yet they are capable of revealing and certifying the beginning of this journey through time. Indicative of the city's prosperity during the Mycenaean period are the layers with abundant pottery and artifacts, combined with the chamber and cist graves found in the area of the western cemetery of the city from historical times.¹³¹ Pharsalus is a palimpsest, indicating that history is continuously written and rewritten on the same canvas, with newer constructions often obscuring the older ones. As a result, the architectural remnants from earlier periods are quite scarce.¹³² The pres-

ent Acropolis is the result of the reconstructions from the Byzantine period.¹³³

The most remarkable artifact preserved from ancient Thessaly was taken by Leon Heyze. It is a relief that currently adorns the Louvre Museum in Paris, depicting two beautiful women (likely Demeter and Persephone) dressed in elaborate attire, holding flowers in their hands, which symbolizes the continuous renewal of nature.¹³⁴ Another significant finding is the structure of the tholos tomb which is situated within an extensive Mycenaean acropolis.¹³⁵ Outside the western section of the wall of ancient Pharsalus and along it, the extensive and best-researched to date, western cemetery of the city was spreading out. This cemetery had a long period of use, from the Mycenaean to the Hellenistic period (16th – 2nd century BC). The graves were opened on either side of the road that connected northern and southern Greece and belong to various types; chamber-like, box-shaped with built walls and slab-lined, sometimes covered by a mound, funerary structures with clay sarcophagi, circular and oval built tombs, tile-roofed. The most significant of these tombs, of those that have been excavated so far, is the large vaulted tomb that stands at the western edge of the modern city, on Lamia Street. This funerary monument was constructed in the late Archaic period (end of the 6th – early 5th century BC) and remained in use until the Hellenistic period, likely as a hero shrine, in its final phase. Certainly, it belonged to one of the prominent families of ancient Pharsalus because only a particularly wealthy family could bear the financial burden of erecting such an expensive monument. The fact that the tomb follows an architectural style centuries out of date, which however, alludes to the glorious Mycenaean past of the city, reveals the deep desire of its owners to declare their close relationship and descent from the Homeric Achilles. The desire of the people of Pharsalus to emphasize their close kinship with the lineage of Achilles and the Myrmidons is also demonstrated by the most significant offering found in the burial chamber which is a magnificent calyx-crater, black-figure vase by the painter Exekias.¹³⁶ This crater not only serves as undeniable evidence of the identity and heritage that the inhabitants of Pharsalus recognized for themselves – something that was undisputed in ancient Greece – but it was also included among the ten most significant discoveries of the National Archaeological Museum in Athens.¹³⁷ Furthermore, a notable artifact has been discovered at Chtouri hill, located in the town of Elliniko, just northwest of Pharsala. This artifact consists of a shard, specifically a fragment of a vase that illustrates a chariot race from the games held in honor of Patroclus following his demise at Troy. Depicted on both sides of the stands in the arena are some people as fans while the name “ΑΧΙΛΕΑΣ” is inscribed in the upper right corner. Crafted by Sophilos between 580 and 570 BC, this piece is currently exhibited at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens.

This opinion is considered to have been constructed in previous times due to specific power circles, in order to serve

¹²⁵ STAHLIN, 2008, 251.

¹²⁶ WACE & THOMPSON 1912, 255.

¹²⁷ PAPARRIGOPOULOS 1886, 126.

¹²⁸ KATAKOUTA ET AL. 2013, 41.

¹²⁹ ANAGNOSTOPOULOS 1995, 32.

¹³⁰ KATAKOUTA/TOUFEXIS 1994, 189.

¹³¹ NOULA 2013, 34–36.

¹³² NOULA/KARACHALIOS 2016, 62.

¹³³ NOULA 2013, 50.

¹³⁴ GRAPSITIS 2005, 24.

¹³⁵ VERDELIS 1952, 198.

¹³⁶ NOULA 2013, 60.

¹³⁷ KARAPANOU/NOULA 2019, 409.

transparent political purposes. It was, after all, a common phenomenon in historical times for various cities to claim either place names or figures from prehistoric and mythical times. Homer is such an example. Regarding the claim of the city of Phthia by Pharsalus, this fact is related to the broader policy of the Thessalian invaders and conquerors in these parts during historical times, who, in order to establish their dominance over the natives and to mitigate or neutralize the dissent and hostility against the foreign origin of the Thessalians, attempted to appropriate and usurp figures and place names from the past.¹³⁸ Still, there is a counterargument. The cult of Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, may have been established or revitalized at Delphi under the influence of the “*Amphictyonic League*” during the early 6th century. Evidence suggests that the area north of the Apollo temple began to be utilized for votive offerings and construction activities in this same period, lending credence to this hypothesis. During this time, the Thessalians held a dominant position within the “*Amphictyony*” and may have initiated the cult of Neoptolemus, to define and reinforce their territorial boundaries while fostering closer relations with Delphi. It has been suggested that the cult was founded shortly after the “*First Sacred War*”, as Thessaly had already achieved military supremacy in northern Greece and the inclusion of Delphi into the Amphictyony presented a grand opportunity for such an initiative. The establishment of Neoptolemus’ cult appears particularly aligned with the interests of the Thessalians, given that Phthiotis was regarded as part of the realm governed by Achilles and Peleus from their city of Pharsalus.¹³⁹ It is plausible that, due to Neoptolemus’ ancestral origins in Phthia, he came to be supported by the Thessalians. The kingdom ruled by Achilles and Peleus encompassed both Phthiotis, located north of the Mount Othrys range and the valley of the Spercheius River to the south.¹⁴⁰ The timely arrival in Delphi indicated the prompt departure from the Thessalian plain, traversing through the Homeric Phthia, the land of Peleus and Achilles, and subsequently crossing the mountainous mass of Othrys.¹⁴¹

Moreover, the coinage of Pharsalus dates back to the 5th and 4th centuries BC. Notably, the depiction on the reverse side of the large bronze coins appears to replicate the dedication of the city at Delphi, as described by the traveler Pausanias. Specifically, it features a mounted Achilles alongside the foot soldier Patroclus. This representation emphasizes the connection between Pharsalus and the circle of Achilles.¹⁴² Besides, at the settlement “*Keramario*” in Paliouria, in the modern Prefecture of Grevena, the four coins discovered in the cemetery on the western hill included three coins of Philip II, featuring the likeness of Apollo on the obverse and a horseman on the reverse, dating from the second half of the 4th century BC. Additionally, there was one coin from Pharsalus, from the second half of the 5th century BC which displayed the head of Athena wearing a Corinthian helmet in three-quarters view on the obverse while the

reverse depicted Achilles riding to the right, accompanied by the foot soldier Patroclus carrying weapons, with the inscription “ΦΑΡΣΑΛΙΩΝ” above.¹⁴³

Last but not least, there is a geoaerchaeological clue which seems to play a very significant role but until nowadays, it is unfortunately quite unknown. During that period, the sea level was higher, facilitating closer access to a western extension of the Pagasetic Gulf. The sea level during the period of the Trojan War was elevated, extending to Trachis and Alope, before subsequently receding by 8.5km or over five miles. This change was part of a gradual rise in sea levels that occurred during the Ice Age, approximately 10,000 to 14,000 years ago when global temperatures increased and caused a melting of ice, resulting in an overall rise of about 20m in sea levels worldwide.¹⁴⁴ This information is of utmost importance because the selection of locations for significant cities during the Mycenaean period was made based on strategic criteria. These cities were established in fortified positions, on elevated ground, near productive areas, with access to ports and with a broad horizon.¹⁴⁵ The ancient Greeks strategically positioned their cities to utilize the sea as a trade route for the exchange of goods while also ensuring that the cities were constructed in a manner that provided defensive advantages. The geographical area of the city needed to be conducive to the health and well-being of its inhabitants.¹⁴⁶ In every instance, the distance of a Mycenaean center from the sea is sometimes a relative matter, as evidenced by Sparta and its port, Gytheio, located in Laconia, in the Peloponnese.

The city of Pharsalus was powerful and prosperous in ancient times, a fact that becomes evident right after the Persian Wars. However, when considering its strategic and fortified location, the fertile plain that surrounds it and the remaining remnants of Cyclopean walls dating back to the pre-Homeric era, one must acknowledge that the city existed under a different name in those ancient times. From the remnants of the ancient city walls that remain today, it can be concluded that the city was large and densely populated.¹⁴⁷ To sum up, the paper ends with the author’s first-hand examination during the previous June. The acropolis of Pharsalus was surrounded by formidable walls, the extensions of which descended to the base of the hill, enclosing the lower city from east to west. Due to the city’s location on a naturally fortified rocky site that was difficult to access, there was no necessity for extensive artificial fortifications. Consequently, remnants of ancient walls, constructed from massive polygonal stones, can only be found at the points where the rock slopes down. On the acropolis, there are two gates, whose architectural arrangement is angled to the left. The continuation of the walls of the lower city can be observed today along the entire slope of the hill. To the west, at a short distance from the rock of the acropolis, another rock juts out, serving as a natural fortress and was not surrounded by walls. The location between the two rocks was safeguarded by a double series of walls, with the outer wall constructed in a Cyclopean polygonal style, while the inner

¹³⁸ VAIRAKLIOTIS 1990, 32.

¹³⁹ DOWNIE 2004, 183.

¹⁴⁰ WOODBURY 1979, 101.

¹⁴¹ HERRIOT 2008, 170.

¹⁴² LAVVA 1992, 529–530.

¹⁴³ KARAMITROU-MENTESIDI 2008, 95.

¹⁴⁴ KARAGEORGOS 2005, 359.

¹⁴⁵ JONES 2006, 404.

¹⁴⁶ CACTUS PHILOLOGICAL TEAM 1993C, 85.

¹⁴⁷ KARATOLIAS 2012, 31.

wall, situated at a higher elevation, was built from regularly hewn stones arranged in horizontal layers. Further north, the left section extends to the sources of the Apidanus River. At the neck of the castle and the Katranas hill, there is the lower gate, which is barely visible as the stones have been dismantled and repurposed as building material. The right section of the city walls extends to the Church of St. Nicholas and there are still several massive polygonal stones that can be observed among the ruins of the Cyclopean walls. On the northern side, where the present city is located, there are no remnants of walls as they have been dismantled and the stones were used for the construction of more modern buildings. In the acropolis, one can find the ruins of walls from various periods, including Mycenaean, Classical, Byzantine and Venetian eras.

CONCLUSION

It seems that ancient Phthia (and Hellas) were indeed ancient cities¹⁴⁸ and that the historical city of Pharsalus succeeded the Homeric Phthia, built directly atop the site of Phthia and covering a larger area.¹⁴⁹ It can be inferred that Pharsalus aligns more closely with the references made by Homer and other writers, as presented within this paper. Undoubtedly, the mountain summit which served as a fortress was the residence of a powerful monarch. The imposing cyclopean walls, the steep southern cliffs, and the breathtaking vistas of the Thessalian plain further substantiate this assertion. This perspective appears to be the prevailing one and it is significant to consider that this particular viewpoint represents only one city, in contrast to a set of general spatial planning positions, as is the case in other instances.¹⁵⁰ The limitation of this survey has to do with the fact that other studies like this must be conducted for other places which claim ancient Phthia in order to compare the theoretical framework; the utter responsibility though lies within archaeological excavation and technology to either refute the current arguments or to highlight the significant potential of ancient Phthia as a possible cultural hub.¹⁵¹

Some suggestions could be “space imaging” and “infrared photography”. Satellites equipped with advanced sensors are capable of capturing high-resolution color images that reveal the intricate textures of various landscapes, including mountains, valleys and urban areas. Utilizing sophisticated computer techniques, three-dimensional modeling can recreate archaeological sites in a virtual reality environment. Additionally, infrared imagery obtained from space can uncover subsurface architectural elements such as walls, foundations, roads and canal systems, proving particularly beneficial for analyzing expansive areas like agricultural land where there are minimal obstructions. These technological advancements have paved the way for the emergence of “Satellite Archaeology”. “Ground Penetrating Radar” (GPR) / “Geo-Magnetic Imaging” (GMR) have been extensively utilized by military forces for the detection of underground structures, such as tunnels. This technology allows for the

generation of a continuous profile of subsurface features without the need for excavation, probing, or drilling, akin to x-ray imaging and it can determine the depth of buried objects. By emitting pulses of ultra-high frequency radio waves (electromagnetic energy) through an antenna, GPR captures color bands that are subsequently recorded in a digital control unit. When operated manually or via a vehicle, GPR can achieve high-resolution penetration up to 30 feet while lower resolution can extend detection capabilities to approximately 100 feet.¹⁵²

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¹⁴⁸ HELLY 1995, 90.

¹⁴⁹ SKRIMPAS 1984, 8.

¹⁵⁰ APOSTOLOPOULOS/BRIANAS 2015, 139–140.

¹⁵¹ SPANOS 2015, 1823.

¹⁵² BRIANAS 2011, 28.

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