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Review of Danilo Leone, Maria Turchiano, *Liburna 1. Archeologia subacquea in Albania. Porti, approdi e rotte marittime*

Danilo Leone, Maria Turchiano, "Liburna 1. Archeologia subacquea in Albania. Porti, approdi e rotte marittime", Edipuglia, Bari 2017, pp. 384.

In 2017, the book by Danilo Leone and Maria Turchiano entitled *Liburna 1. Archeologia subacquea in Albania. Porti, approdi e rotte marittime* was published. It is dedicated to the study and the analysis of some submerged archaeological contexts in southern Albania. The first word of the title, *Liburna*, related to the name of an ancient Illyrian boat, is also the name of the project from which the book is derived, which was directed by Giuliano Volpe from 2007 to 2010: an example of a multidisciplinary approach useful in the reconstruction of coastal landscapes.

It is a very interesting book because of the lack of the coastal surveys and archaeological research in this country, most of which have not yet been published. In fact, it was only in 2006 that a first international conference was held in Durres, *La tecnologia e il know how italiano per la valorizzazione del patrimonio subacqueo in Albania*, achieved through the competence and the promotion of Sara Santoro. In that meeting the potential of this field and certain criticisms were clarified, in particular the ones caused by the limited legislation against clandestine excavations, unauthorized settlements, uncontrolled fishing, as well as the need to operate in a broad perspective, managing skills and obtaining adequate funding.

As in many other cases of studies applied to multi-layered archaeological contexts, the first step was to design a computing system (database) for the archiving of the archaeological, geomorphological, geographical, environmental, historical, and epigraphic dataset, to which the graphic documentation is added, as well as the photographic and bibliographic elements. In this sense the volume offers a very clear explanation of the database (pp. 27-28): there is a first section dedicated to the data necessary for location recognition of the Underwater Topographic System (UTS) and of the site (registry data: geographical and topographical location, survey mode, visibility), and a second part which is useful in providing a detailed

description of the context and of the UTS (DESCRIPTIVE DATA: context and artifact morphology, relations among stratigraphic layers, chronological, bibliographical and graphic information etc.). Furthermore, an important fact is that the authors rightly envisaged an analysis not limited to the single US but instead carried out a broader study of within the area of reference, therefore the immediate hinterland as well. This allows the reader to get an overview and an evaluation of the connections and the geomorphological changes that have occurred over the millennia.

In the book the coastal sites from Valona to Porto Palermo are analyzed in detail: the gulf of *Aulona*, the bays of the peninsula of Karaburun (to the east the sites of Ragusa, Saint Basilio, Saint Giovanni, to the west the ones of Dafine, Orso, Grammata), the quarries of Mermer (again in the peninsula of Karaburun), and the bay of Porto Palermo, between Himera and Saranda. Given the specificity of the sites examined, it would have been helpful to provide a general map of Albania at the beginning of the book (note that there is only one map with the location of some UTS on p. 29).

Among these study sites, the case of the Gulf of Valona by Danilo Leone stands out. The topographical structure of the gulf is reconstructed on the basis of travel reports from the Middle Ages and Modern times and historical cartography: among the first written sources relating to the Illyrian territory (Albania is mentioned *tout court* only from the XV century) the work of Anna Comnena, Byzantine princess, daughter and biographer of Alessio I Comneno (1069-1118), is mentioned. This is in fact one of the Medieval texts containing rather detailed information on the eastern Adriatic coast, which was then under Constantinople's control. In drafting the work (15 books), the author used documents taken from official archives and diplomatic sources, which she could view directly in the court of Byzantium: she mentioned, for example, the port of *Hiericò*, where sailors found shelter from bad weather and enemy incursions, as well as the itinerary from the Otranto Channel to the Albanian coasts, which also provided for much older routes, as Lorenzo Braccesi has shown a few years ago (L. Braccesi, *Ionios Poros. La porta dell'Occidente. Secondo supplemento a Grecità adriatica*, *Hesperia* 31, L'Erma di Bretschneider, Roma 2014).

Then, D. Leone cites two important documents, namely the portolan of the Turkish admiral Piri Re'is, containing the description of the Valona lagoon and its natural resources (the abundance of fish in the inland lake and the rich water of the large Iring Suyu river, a source of fresh water essential also for Venetian galleys and sailors); and one of the first historical maps of Albania, not surprisingly preserved in Venice, in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana. Here in fact, as well as in the Library of the Museo Correr in Venice, there are numerous maps and documents relating to the Albanian coasts and interiors, of which an exhibition was held in Tirana in 1998 (*Albania. Immagini e documenti dalla Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana e*

dalle *Collezioni del Museo Correr*, Catalogo della mostra di cartografia storica adriatica, Tirana 1998. Promoting Institutions: Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Fondazione Soros, Biblioteka Kombëtare di Tirana, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana di Venezia, Musei Civici Veneziani). The Serenissima had very close and fruitful relations with Albania of mutual support and a solid alliance, as has been well outlined in numerous studies by Lucia Nadin (among which see at least: L. Nadin, *Migrazioni e integrazione. Il caso degli Albanesi a Venezia (1479-1552)*, Bulzoni, Roma 2008). It should come as no surprise, therefore, that in the Venetian archives and libraries there is a prized documentation on Albania and the Epirotian borders, on the contrary, it should be emphasized that in those cultural centers much remains to be discovered, deciphered and described, especially in regards to the antiquarian sphere (I would like to propose my own recent article: Maddalena Bassani, *Scanderbeg, il nuovo Alessandro. Sollecitazioni classiche e cultura antiquaria*, in *Il Veltro. Rivista della civiltà italiana. La simbolicità di Scanderbeg ponte tra l'Albania e l'Europa cristiana. Numero unico nel 550° anno della morte dell'eroe nazionale albanese*, 2019, pp. 69-88).

In order to frame underwater archaeological discoveries in a more precise perspective, the contribution of D. Leone presents the two sites of the area of Valona, both the subject of investigations *ad hoc*, *Orikos* and *Capo Treporti*. The same reconstructive scheme is proposed for both locations: description of the current landscape, analysis of information derived from ancient written sources, history of research, underwater prospecting and working hypotheses.

Among the ancient sources inherent to *Orikos*, a passage by Pliny the Elder appears relevant, in which the geomorphological changes affecting the settlement are accounted for: in the I cent. AD this place was part of the list of sites that had once been islands and that nature had then joined the continent. In these geo-environmental dynamics, did not escape the changes due also to the substantial alluvial deposits of the rivers present there did not escape the Roman naturalist (pp. 44-55): here the rivers, as in other contexts, were the first architects, together with human skill, in the creation of changing landscapes such as coastal ones. And regarding the geo-environmental alterations that have occurred over time within the bay of Valona, the author provides a good reference framework, after tracing a brief history of the nineteenth-century descriptions and research previously carried out on the site (pp. 49-52). In fact, illustrating the underwater explorations carried out there (pp. 53-59), D. Leone outlines both the natural dynamics that came into play in the formation of the current *Orikos* lagoon, and the traces of human presence detected thanks to the research project. In particular, the remains of a big wall structure stand out which extends from the shoreline towards the center of the lagoon for over 40 m, with an average thickness of 1.8 m: made of large limestone blocks with a core in mixed stones and with worked earthenware ashlar, the construction seems to be able to be interpreted with a long quay for anchoring boats. It must have been served, it is easy to suppose, by additional infrastructures

including a probable internal canal, which facilitated movements from the open sea to the lagoon and vice versa.

Even in the case of Capo Treporti, north of Valona, the proposed documentation is numerous. Here, too, there is the study and analysis of the geo-environmental changes that have taken place, due both to the progressive covering up of the area linked to the tidal changes, and to the advancement of the delta of the river Vjosa in the direction of the sea, with the consequent creation of new lagoons and the disappearance of the existing ones (pp. 60-61). Furthermore, Medieval documentary sources, including Anna Comnena again, recall here the clash between the Byzantine fleet and the military contingent led by Riccardo di Salerno in 1096, as well as a pirate attack that took place in 1270 by two ships against a merchant ship of the Venetian Meglioraro Farro.

Projecting the reconstruction of the human settlement even further back, however, it is evident that the Capo Treporti site underwent an early frequentation between the Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age, followed by a proto-urban phase between the VII-V cent. BC and a complete urbanization between the V and I cent. BC. This phase is also attested to by walls that speak to a flourishing development especially in the Hellenistic period. The author agrees with the hypothesis of P. Cabanes and F. Drini (*Corpus des inscriptions grecques d'Illyrie méridionale et d'Épire*, 3, Athènes 2016, pp. 125-126) according to which the site corresponds to the ancient *Thronion* mentioned by Pausania in the *Cerauni* mountains (Paus. V 22, 3): it explains the complexity of the remains preserved both on the hilly promontory, where the residential sector probably extended, and in the lagoon port area, for commercial and defensive purposes. The underwater investigations have in fact allowed for a powerful defensive structure to be detected, extending for over 700 m parallel to the coast and interspersed with quadrangular towers. These constructions should date to the Hellenistic wall circuit of the city, which, expanding towards the sea, ensured a strengthening of its fortifications in the lagoon sector, where areas intended for shipbuilding and commercial activities were perhaps active, including fish trade. A small fishpond recognized at about 20 m from the promontory could attest to it.

From the study and analysis of the site and the finds, the author concludes the contribution by emphasizing that thanks to the *Liburna* project it is now possible to affirm how the Epirot coastal sector headed by Valona constituted for Byzantium a fundamental strategic place in the control of goods and commercial traffic in the Adriatic, including that of salt (as happened for the famous 'white salt' of the Durres area). If in fact it is probable that with the II sec. AD the settlement on the promontory has undergone a contraction and a cessation of life, the late imperial and early medieval finds overlooking the lagoon also indicate a significant development of the port sector, which had to be configured as «an *emporium* without a city». The links with the settlement dynamics of other Adriatic sites are manifold

and it is thanks to the authors of this volume that the foundations for profiling further future research have been laid.

Moreover, the geographic boundaries of the *Epirus* area have been changing for a long time and therefore difficult to recognize and to reconstruct, as is clear from the hints of an anonymous author of the IV cent. AD in the book *Description of the world and the people* (§ LIII): «After Achaia there are the regions of *Epirus* and the city called *Epirus*; the actual province is called by some *Epirus*, by others *Etolia*. After these cities there is that of Nicopoli, which has such an abundance of sea fish that it comes to disgust anyone who sees it. Slightly higher than it is *Dalmatia*, which – it is said – is eminent in business. Dalmatian cheese, timber and iron are three useful products that it has in abundance and which it exports. There is a splendid city: Salona; in fact Durres was destroyed by the divinity as a consequence of the wickedness of its inhabitants, or rather – according to what is said – was submerged and disappeared [*scilicet* for the earthquake of 347 AD]» (cfr. ed. by U. Livadiotti and M. Di Branco, Salerno Editrice, Roma 2005).

So, if for a IV cent. AD writer the Epirot-Dalmatian area could extend from Nicopoli to Salona in a coastal strip with uncertain boundaries, which only in recent times have defined themselves, a distinctive feature however seems to unite those places, that is, their projection on the sea as a source of trade and therefore of wealth. A sea that is clearly the Adriatic, which (just the reference of G. Volpe in the preface to the volume), Egidio Ivetic defined as «*pianura liquida*» or a liquid plain (E. Ivetic, *L'Adriatico come spazio storico transnazionale*, Mediterranea, XII, 35, pp. 483–498, *ivi* p. 489): here, people, goods, businesses, political and military interests have interacted seamlessly over the millennia, in a whirlwind of circuits and short circuits largely to be recalled within that vast Mediterranean horizon outlined by P. Matvejevic (*Mediterraneo. Un nuovo breviario*, Milano 1993).

The contribution that underwater archeology and the *Liburna* project have been able to give is therefore of great importance: we hope that this work continues and for an expansion of the areas of study.

