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A Contribution to the Search for Ancient Helike

One of the most intriguing riddles still puzzling archaeologists today is the exact location of ancient Helike.

According to existing sources, this ancient city was both the political and religious capital of the Achaean League. The territorial boundaries of this important confederation of twelve city-states, known at that time as «Achaëa», stretched 140 kilometres along the coast of the northern Peloponnese from Aristonautae (present-day Xylocastro) on the Corinthian Gulf, to the ancient city of Dyme overlooking the Gulf of Patras in the west. Protected by a barrier of mountain ridges, the territories extended some way inland, encompassing a broad area of hinterland.

From early times, the city-states of Achaëa encouraged a spirit of harmonious co-existence and collaboration (Paus. 7.7.1), promoting a neutral, yet flexible policy towards other city-states. Thus, at least until the third century B.C., they remained, in principle, uninvolved in the turbulent arena of political upheaval continuously threatening the rest of Greece (Paus. 7.6.3 f.). This period of stability, during which the city-states thrived in an environment of social and political harmony, free from internal strife, lasted up until the time of the Macedonian era (Paus. 7.7.1 f.; Polyb. 2.41.6; Strabo 8.7.1). Benefiting from the natural wealth of the alluvial-rich soil, abundant water supply and temperate climate, the cities of Achaëa also enjoyed a period of healthy economic growth.

Such must have been the case for ancient Helike, occupying a position of unrivalled supremacy amongst the other city-states (Diod. 15.48.3). From the time of its founding during the Mycenaean period Helike became firmly established as the religious metropolis of the Ionian Greeks, the «very holy sanctuary» of Helikonian Poseidon (Paus. 7.24.5), claiming the central focus of religious life.

Thus, in terms of archaeological importance, the location of ancient Helike can justifiably rival those of Troy, Mycenae and Thera.

As is well-documented, in about the year 373 B.C., ancient Helike was shaken by an earthquake conservatively estimated at point 7 on the Richter scale. Whatever survived the devastating quake was engulfed by an en-

suing tsunami of considerable magnitude. Large areas of land were submerged (Paus. 7.24.6-7 and 12; Strabo 8.7.2 and 1.3.18; Diod. 15.48.1 f.; Arist. *Meteor.* 2.8: 368b).

The riddle of the location of ancient Helike has remained unsolved for so long due in large part to the influence exerted over subsequent generations of archaeologists by the misinterpretation of sources (Pausanias in particular) and events by the *French Expédition Scientifique de Morée* (1835).

Pausanias states that ancient Helike lay at a distance of 40 stades (7.4 km) from the ancient city of Aigion (present-day Aigion), and 30 stades (5.5 km) in a direct line from the cave dedicated to Herakles situated on the Bouraikos river, near the ancient city of Boura (Paus. 7.24.5 and 7.25.11).

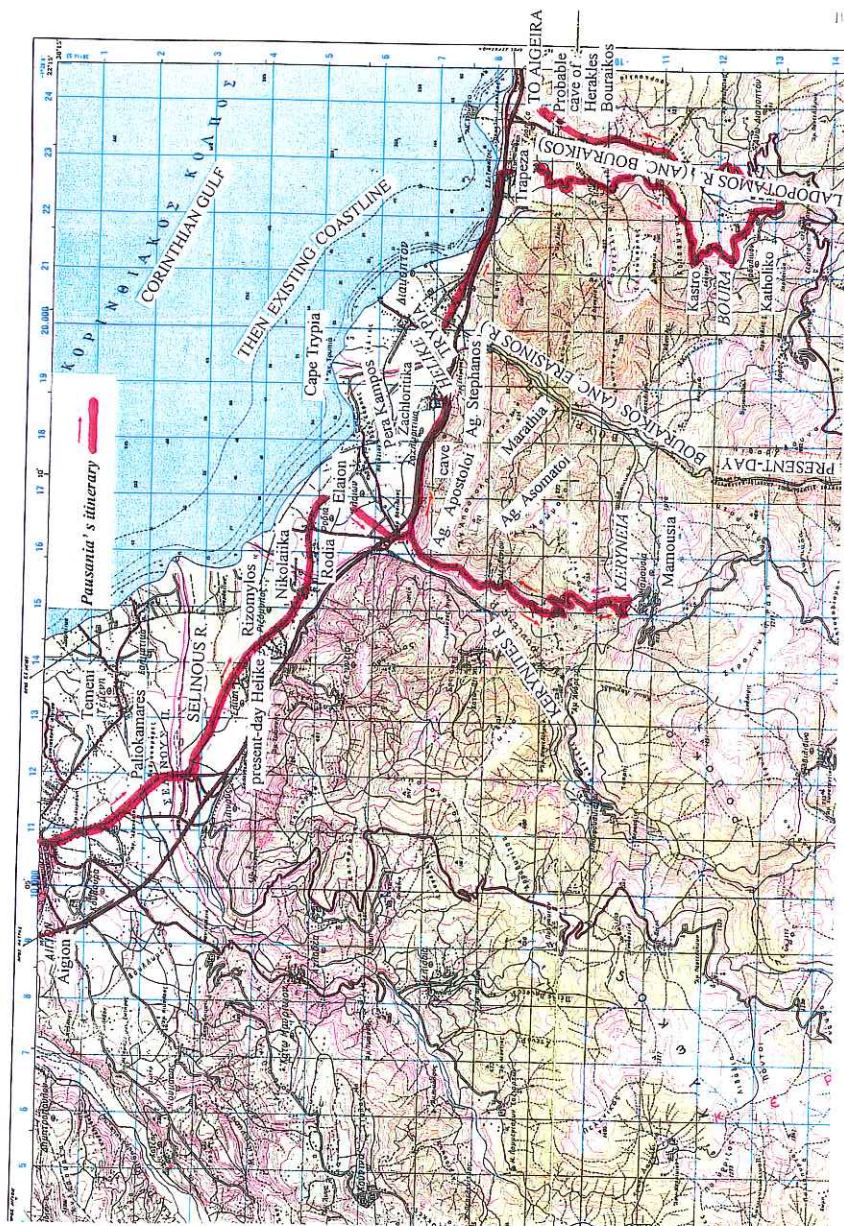
Basing their interpretation largely upon this source, the French *Expédition* (E. Puillon de Boblaye, 1835, 25; cf. Curtius, 1851, 469; Frazer, 1898, 168-169; Marinatos, 1960, 189 f.) agreed conclusively that the location of ancient Helike was at a point some 7-8 km from present-day Aigion, near the banks of the Selinous River, in or around the present day villages of Rizomylos, Nikolaiika and Eliki (not to be confused with the ancient city of the same name). Their opinion was further strengthened by the location of a large cave considered to be dedicated to Herakles at Trypia («The Holes»), 165 km from Athens on the Old National Road, 6 km from Nikolaiika (Fig. 1). Besides localized evidence of worship, some have suggested that the carving over the entrance of the cave was a representation of a lion's head, symbolizing Herakles (Katsonopoulou and Soter 1993, 61).

This study argues for an alternative and altogether more plausible interpretation of the sources and events.

According to Pausanias, the cave honouring Herakles Bouraikos was located on a river. Not only did the established opinion locate the cave at some distance from any river, it placed the location roughly equidistant between two rivers, the present-day Vouraikos and Kerynites (1.2 and 2 km respectively), neither of which, despite the name of the former, appear to bear any relation to the ancient city of Boura.

Recent archaeological findings, namely the positive identification of Keryneia on the site previously believed to have been ancient Boura, near the present-day village of Mamousia (D. Katsonopoulou and St. Soter, 1993, 64 and fn. 15), have radically shaken the established point of view.

The next piece in the puzzle to fit was to relocate the exact site of ancient Boura. There are strong indications, proposed by Ernst Meyer in 1939 (p.127 f.), that this ancient city was probably located 500 m. away from the settlement Kastro and near the village Katholiko.



In the light of this proposal, it seems reasonable to suggest that the present-day river of Ladopotamos, flowing east of Katholiko, is in fact the ancient river of Bouraikos. If this is so, the present-day Vouraikos could well be the river noted by Strabo (8.8.3) as Erasinios.

Bearing in mind the boundaries of ancient Arcadia recently proposed by Papachatzis (1991, 153), and in accordance with the description given by Pausanias (7.25.5), there is little doubt in my mind that the river tracing its course down to ancient Keryneia does, in fact, rise in ancient Arcadia and is indeed the ancient river of Kerynites (present-day Kerynites or Boufousia). Consequently, explorations to find the cave of Herakles Bouraikos should not be undertaken at the 165th km point on the Old National Road, as the previously established opinion claims, but more fruitfully some kilometers to the east, near the present-day Ladopotamos. This hypothesis is further strengthened by the fact that according to Pausanias (7.26.1), the cave of Herakles Bouraikos lies about 72 stades (13.3 km) from the ancient city of Aigeira (present-day Aigeira). Given that the main road from Aigeira to Aigion has not significantly changed course since ancient times, and in further justification of its identity as the ancient river of Bouraikos, the Ladopotamos river does, in fact, lie at a distance of 12 km from Aigeira. Thus, the search for the cave of Herakles should focus on one of the banks of this river, about 1.3 km away from the main road leading to Aigion.

Based on the same calculations, explorations to locate ancient Helike should focus on a site about 5.5 km (30 stades) in direct line to the west of this cave, namely in the region of Trypia, near the present-day village of Zachloritika, on a hill now called Aghios Stephanos, about 1 km to the east of what I consider to be the erroneously located cave of Herakles Bouraikos.

Pausanias gives the distance between Aigion and Helike as 40 stades (7.4 km). By interpreting the sources in this way, Trypia lies at a distance of 12 km from Aigion and not 7.4 km, admitting a discrepancy of 4.6 km. Yet if one adds the individual distances given by Pausanias for his itinerary from Aigion to Aigeira via the cave of Herakles Bouraikos (40+30+72 stades), one reaches a total of 142 stades (26.3 km). By subtracting this total from the actual distance of 31 km, one finds a difference of 4.7 km. If the distances recorded by Pausanias are correct, and I believe this is likely to be the case, given that he probably received his information from older sources, then there is only one possible explanation for these missing 4.7 km. The distance between Aigion and Helike was measured not from the city centre of Aigion, but from the bed of the ancient river of Selinous marking the boundaries between the *chora* of Helike and Aigion (speculatively located at present-day Paliokamares), up to which point the habitations of

ancient Aigion probably extended (cf. Strabo 8.7.5 «And the Selinous river flows through the territory of Aigion»). Furthermore, the distance from this river bed to the great plane tree on the shore of Aigion is about 4 km.

The hypothesis that the site of ancient Helike is more likely to be found in the area of Trypia and not near the banks of the Selinous, as the established view claims, is supported by further indications, expounded in the following four main groups of argument.

A first consideration concerns the location of Trypia and Helike as being one and the same. In a passage from *Geographia* (3.15.16; cf. R. Stieglitz, 1981, 146 f.), a commentary on the ancient geographer Claudius Ptolemy (108 - 160 A.D.) noted «Helike, the Trypia (?) (or: below Trypia) is now deserted».

In later times, especially during the 17th and 18th centuries, authors noted that «Helike is now commonly called Trypia» (Meletios, *Old and New Geography*, in Greek, Venice, 1728, 361). While it could be argued that Ptolemy's information concerns the Roman period, it must also refer back to the classical period of antiquity. The location of Trypia, which means «holes» and is related to the so-called cave of Herakles Bouraikos (Xinopoulos, 1912, 109), has a particularly descriptive name, which cannot offer much pretext for misunderstandings. This is evident from the fact that these holes or openings are still clearly visible today. What is more, it must be stressed that the note in Ptolemy encouraged prominent scholars, like Ernst Meyer (1939, 140 and 1957, 81 f.) and Nicholas Moutsopoulos (1958, 5), to reject the established belief regarding the site of Helike near the Selinous and to relocate it on the right bank of the Kerynites river.

Secondly, the location of Trypia is situated at a distance of 12 km from Aigion, the city next in political power to Helike, which assumed, after the destruction of Helike, the presidency of the Achaean League (Paus. 7.7.2). Two cities of such political significance could hardly stand apart by a distance of only 7.4 km (40 stades), as Pausanias' description was considered to mean.

Besides, according to ancient sources, the region of Achaea had been divided equally between its twelve city-states (Hdt. 1.145; Strabo 8.7.4; Paus. 7.6.1). Aigion, a city-state with a vast and populous rural hinterland (cf. Paus. 7.18.3 f; Strabo 8.7.5), should have extended at least up to the former bed of Selinous river (Strabo 8.7.5), or even up to the western bank of the Kerynites river. Thus it is natural to suppose that Helike should have had a hinterland equal to the size of Aigion or perhaps even greater, as befitted its position as capital of the Achaean League. Therefore, it should have occupied at least the area between the former beds of the rivers of Kerynites and present-day Vouraikos (ancient Erasinos). Yet it is precisely this

area (plain and hills) which was known, in general, as Trypia. Hence, this area has been identified as ancient Helike since the time of Ptolemy. Conversely, other territories, such as those which lie above the village of Rizomylos, between the rivers of Selinous and Kerynites, neither form part of the area called Trypia, nor fulfill the requirement of similar distances between city-states.

Thirdly, the identification of ancient Helike with Trypia seems to be in full accordance with the description given by Pausanias regarding the itinerary he followed from Aigion to Aigeira. After leaving Aigion and passing the Selinous river, Pausanias first visited the sea shore of what was believed to have been ancient Helike, where he records seeing «some ruins», but «corroded by salt water» (7.24.13 and 5). Afterwards he deviated from the main road (near the shore), to the right in order to reach Keryneia, «on a mountain above the high road» (Paus. 7.25.5; cf. Strabo 8.7.5 «Here is too Ceraunia, which is situated on a high rock, in equal distance from Boura and the sea»).

If one accepts that the Kerynites river had once followed a straight course down to the sea, flowing somewhere between the villages of Rodia and Elaion, and that subsequent seismic activity and alluvial deposits changed its course northwest, Pausanias' itinerary can be interpreted as follows. The first part of Pausanias' route took him to the supposed remains of ancient Helike in the region of Elaion and Trypia. Soon afterwards, he turned inland towards Keryneia, using the road along the Kerynites river which nowadays leads to the village of Mamousia. Returning to the main road by the same way, Pausanias proceeded for about 9 km and then turned to the right once again, away from the shore (7.25.8), at a point where the present-day village of Trapeza lies. From this junction he followed the road up to the ancient city of Boura, a distance, according to Strabo (8.7.5), of some 40 stades (7.4 km). On his descent, he circled down along the road following the right bank of the Ladopotamos (speculatively the ancient Bouraikos) river. Nearing the end of his itinerary, Pausanias must have seen and visited the cave of Herakles Bouraikos (7.25.10). It is, however, difficult to ascertain the existence of this cave nowadays, given the intensity of seismic activity and frequency of landslides in the area. After leaving the cave, it seems Pausanias continued directly to the northeast, descending to the main street which leads to Aigeira.

The hypothesis that ancient Helike was situated at the location of Trypia is further supported by evidence found in the writings of Aelian in his work *On the characteristics of animals* (11.19). The author notes that five days before the earthquake of 373 B.C., various little creatures such as mice, martens and snakes, presumably in presentiment of the forthcoming

earthquake, fled Helike for Keryneia, it being the nearest neighbouring settlement of a height that could offer them shelter and protection. This concurs with the opinion expressed here, that Helike stood mainly upon the hill of Aghios Stefanos (Trypia), on the front or north side of the mountain of Aghioi Asomatoi; the city of Keryneia standing some way above it, on the same range.

Fourthly, the hills at the location Trypia dominate the entire region between the Kerynites and the present-day Vouraikos rivers, offering a natural barrier of obvious strategic value. Thanks to the morphology of the ground, the two rivers complete the effective defence of the area. Of these hills, Aghios Stephanos is particularly imposing, secure on at least three sides. To the south, the high mountains of Aghioi Apostoloi and Marathia rise behind the hill like a backbone. To the north, the ascent is steep and barely accessible. It should be borne in mind, however, that landslides following in the wake of the 1861 earthquake, must have changed the original topography of the landscape significantly. To the west gapes a precipitous ravine traversed by a partially paved pathway leading to the hill. Finally, to the east the ground falls away, facilitating communication, yet providing the kind of terrain suitable for good fortification. Indeed, while ascending the hill from this side one can still observe huge stones fitting together.

Furthermore, on the hill of Aghios Stephanos there is an abundantly supplied fountain and also a sheltered cistern. The latter have recently been fenced in, hindering examination of its present state of preservation. Clearly visible are the remains a watercourse, 0.7 m in breadth, for the collection and redirection of rain water. Undoubtedly, these are constructions dating back at least to the 16th and 17th centuries, indicating that the area was used as a place of shelter and habitation of old. The location of the church of Aghia Irini, in close proximity to the cistern, can also be offered as evidence to suggest that another place of worship may have existed there in ancient times, as is often the case. Furthermore, proceeding westwards from the church, one comes to the above-mentioned, well-preserved pathway, similar to those which are found in other barely accessible places in Greece. This pathway constitutes the only means of safe passage over the steep ravine to the west of the hill. This goes some way to explain why this route was protected by ramparts and/or other ancient edifices, some of which are still in evidence today. It is noteworthy that numerous travellers and scholars of the 19th century, such as Pouqueville (1820, 567, 569), Dodwell (1819, 303), Leake (1830, 397, 399) and Curtius (1851, 471), on their way from Mega Spileo to ancient Keryneia (which they took erroneously for ancient Boura) and afterwards to Aigion, not only used this very path (they called this place «Metokhi of Aghia Irini») but reported in

their writings that they had observed antiquities. In addition, from the rest of the hill and particularly at a short distance from the church, amidst the old olive trees, one can see certain configurations of stones fitting together in a geometrical formation, similar in style of construction and material to those which Papachatzis (1991, 165) mentions in connection with the walls of Aigeira. These observations strongly suggest that in older times, the hill of Aghios Stephanos at the location of Trypia must have been the site of a fortified habitation, thus combining the functions of both an acropolis and a settlement.

According to the ancient sources, it is known that Helike enjoyed the prestige and protection of an acropolis during the Mycenaean ages. Herodotus (1.145), Pausanias (7.1.8 and 7.6.1) and Strabo (8.7.4) testify that at the end of the Mycenaean period, the Ionians of the area, after having been attacked by the Achaean King Tisamenos, son of Orestes and grandson of Agamemnon, took refuge in Helike and succeeded in withstanding the siege for a considerable time. Interestingly, the Achaeans were not able to take possession of the fortification and were finally obliged to allow the Ionians to depart under a truce. This suggests that the acropolis of Helike was situated in a particularly strong strategic position; invincible under attack and impenetrable under siege. Drawing on the arguments presented above, the hill of Aghios Stephanos could indeed offer such protection. Apart from the above-mentioned defensive advantages, the height of the conjectured site of Helike also boasts an extensive flat surface in the form of a plateau (estimated area of about 750 sq.m), with a plentiful supply of potable water and cultivable soil. Moreover, the altitude of the proposed site is relatively low (about 200 m), as is similarly the case for most Mycenaean acropolises such as Athens, Mycenae, Midea in Argos, Tiryns, Gla by Lake Copais.

No indications from the ancient sources bear witness to the later fate of the acropolis of Helike. Yet, whatever its historical evolution may have been, it would be peculiar and inexplicable if the inhabitants of Helike had not availed themselves, in subsequent years, of the protection of a fortified place. The likelihood of attack from pirates or other adversaries was very real (cf. Isocr. *Panegyricus*, 115). Likewise a safe haven from the dangers of flooding and malaria, both of which constantly threatened the region, would have necessitated the existence of some form of refuge.

Owing to the great importance the ancient Greeks attached to healthy living conditions, pertaining to climate and positioning of sites (Aristot. *Polit.*, 7.10.1: 1330a 39; Hippocr. *Airs, Waters, Places*, 1 f., 5.7 f.; Vitruvius, *On Archit.*, 1.4.1), it seems more than likely that the inhabitants would have found the living conditions in the lower-lying coastal areas un-

pleasant to an intolerable degree.

In this sense, the maintenance of the acropolis in ancient Helike was, to my mind, a matter of survival for its inhabitants. As such, its development can not be paralleled to the usual evolution of other Mycenaean acropoleis which, in general, gradually began to fulfil a more ceremonial and religious role (cf. Aristot. *Polit.*, 7.10.4: 1330b 20 f.). The function of the acropolis of Helike can not be compared to those of other acropoleis for an additional reason. It has been speculated that the acropolis of Helike encompassed a large surface area on the hill of Aghios Stephanos. As such, this area could well have offered habitation and protection to the entire population of Helike.

If we accept that the hill of Aghios Stephanos had sheltered the acropolis of Helike even during the years after the Mycenaean age, then it is likely that this settlement edged its way down the side below the acropolis (Wycheley, 1949, 5) to establish a sheltered harbour town in the place where the sanctuary of Helikonian Poseidon had been. The creation of such sheltered harbour towns under the auspices of the main city, was a fairly typical development for cities situated near the sea (e.g. Samos, Thassos, Halikarnassos), flourishing as centres of maritime commerce in times of peace, and providing vital logistical support in times of war.

Sheltered harbour towns had also been constructed in Achaea, for example on the shore of Aigeira, about 2 km. below the fortified city (Paus. 7.26.1; Polyb. 4.57.5). Indeed, similar harbour villages, connected to an upper main town, can still be seen in many Greek islands or mainland coastal areas today. Since no other coastal city of the Achaean League was without the simultaneous cover and outlet of a fortified height, it would have been far stranger, as several eminent scholars have pointed out (Curtius 1851, 467-8; Bölte 1912, 2857; Marinatos 1960, 189), if Helike had stood unprotected in the middle of a flat valley. This observation becomes all the more pertinent, when one considers the attractive target for pirates and plunderers that the treasury of Helike offered, with its abundance of wealth from the pilgrims' dedications.

Consequently, up until the time of its destruction, the main city of ancient Helike must have stood solidly flanked on the plateau and the foot of the hill which was originally used as its acropolis (most probably the hill of Aghios Stephanos). The location of the sanctuary of Helikonian Poseidon had initially been situated near the sea, perhaps 2 km. from the base of the acropolis of Helike. Continuous alluvial deposits from neighbouring rivers built up and extended the coastline in front of the sanctuary seawards, so that by the time of the 373 B.C. quake, the sanctuary was, in fact, some way inland.

This latter hypothesis is further strengthened by additional arguments concerning the shaping of areas in the vicinity of river beds by the spread of alluvial deposits. It is well documented that such deposits can create a combination of fertile and uncultivable land extending over large areas. This is more pronounced when a river rises in high mountains of easily erodable matter, as is the case in Achaëa. In relation to the area above the site which Prof. Marinatos (1960, 192) suggested could be ancient Helike, he estimated that the average extension of the soil created by alluvial deposits is 1 m per year. However, at the 1979 First Congress on Ancient Helike, others claimed that the deposits in the region of Valimitika village had covered an area of approximately 100 m during one life time, taken as 75 years (*Proceedings*, 1981, 51 and 124). Even if we accept that part of the land created in this manner has sunk into the Corinthian gulf, either as a result of landslides, or by the gradual rising of the water level since ancient times, the rate of deposit in this area can be estimated at 1 km per 1000 years. From this point of view, it would not be surprising if geological studies indicate that at the time of the destruction of Helike the deposits had created a coastline calculated at 4 km away from the base of the surrounding hills (of the same opinion: Bölte 1912, 2857; Marinatos 1960, 190; Schwartz/ Tziavos 1979, 252).

Today, the distance from the foot of these hills up to the cape of Trypia, where the present-day Vouraikos meets the sea, is approximately 2 km. The borders of Helike at the time of its destruction were at a distance of 12 stadia (2.2 km.) from the shore (Strabo 8.7.2). Thus, it follows that the theoretically habitable area of ancient Helike should be searched for along these 2 km, namely, from the conjectured side of the sanctuary of Poseidon to the foot of the hills, in the area enclosed by the Kerynites in its ancient rectangular course and the present-day Vouraikos, and not in the sea.

However, I believe the area of ancient Helike inhabited at the time of its destruction can be narrowed down still further, to include the hill of Aghios Stephanos, the sloping territory at the foot of this hill and the region situated on both sides of the main road leading from the city to the sanctuary and the sheltered harbour town of Helike. It has already been suggested that the inhabitants of Helike would avoid populating the unwholesome, flat sedimentary area of their territory, preferring to extend their inhabited area lengthways along the foot of the hill under their acropolis, rather than down along the marshy plain. This interpretation is in accordance with Homer's description of Helike as «broad» (Il. 2.575), which I believe we can interpret as «long and thin». It was most likely the narrowness of the area in addition to political change, such as the decline of the monarchy, that forced a considerable number of the inhabitants to leave Helike in 730/720

B.C. and establish the famous colony of Sybaris in southern Italy (Strabo 6.1.13; Diod. 12.9.1). It is interesting to point out that the people of Helike built their new city between the estuaries of two rivers (the Krathis and Sybaris) joined by a sickle-shaped bay and sheltered, to the rear, by a high mountain, in all probability reminiscent of their motherland.

In view of these observations, the following hypothesis is proposed. Although the ancient city of Helike was destroyed completely, it does not necessarily mean, in my opinion, that Helike was submerged in its entirety. On the contrary, the greater part of it, lying above and around the acropolis (most probably at the hill of Aghios Stephanos), not only stood intact by the sea, but was later annexed to the city-state of Aigion (Strabo 8.7.5; Paus. 7.25.4). Only the territory located between the sanctuary of Helikonios Poseidon (nowadays probably on the shore northwards from the hill of Aghios Stephanos, in the area between the camp site «Elaion» and Cape Trypia) and the then existing coastline, one km further to the north (nowadays below sea-level) was submerged. This part of ancient Helike is thought to have subsided gradually, to a depth of only 6-8 m, since (a) the tops of the trees of the sanctuary of Helikonios Poseidon were still visible (Paus. 7.24.12), (b) the nets of the fishermen became entangled on the sea horse which was held by the still upright bronze statue of Poseidon (testimony by Eratosthenes in Strabo 8.7.2) and (c) the Ionians from Asia Minor who requested the *aphidrysis* of the sanctuary in order to rebuild a similar sanctuary in their own region (Strabo 8.7.2 and Curtius 1851, 490 fn 10; cf. Diod. 15.49.2 f.) were given the *aphidrysis* after the catastrophe (see Katsonopoulou, 1998).

It should be added that similar low depth submersions were observed during later seismic activity, notably following the earthquakes of 26.12.1861 and more recently 15.6.1995. During the former (estimated magnitude 6.7) caused by the same fault responsible for the ancient Helike quake, a coastal zone 13 km in length and 100 m in breadth extending from the village of Temeni up to the estuary of Ladopotamos (ancient Bouraikos) was reported to have sunk to a depth of 2 m (J. Schmidt, 1867, 13, 20f.). Furthermore, the quake of 1995 (magnitude 6.2), caused subsidence along the coastline from the area of Pera Kampos, near the camp site Elaion, up to the mouth of the Selinous River.

The behavior of these submersions is connected to the fact that the sedimentary areas of the three rivers do not have a foundation on solid ground and can easily slide to the greater depths of the Corinthian gulf in the event of recurring seismic activity.

It is highly likely that the earthquake of magnitude 7 (corresponding to 30 quakes of magnitude 6) which destroyed ancient Helike caused submer-

sions of considerably greater length and depth than those caused by more recent quakes. It has already been suggested that an extended area between the sanctuary of Helikonios Poseidon and the then existing coastline sank to a depth of 6-8 m. Yet it is difficult to suppose that Helike in its entirety, was totally submerged in this way.

Prof. Marinatos (1960, 189-190) stresses: «The trees of the grove of Poseidon, which surely grew in the plain, were almost covered by the tide, but not the town itself, since it stood on the height, apparently surrounded by walls» (...) «I see but one possibility: Both cities (i.e. Helike and Boura) possessed little harbour towns which were subsequently submerged, and the event was later transferred to the main towns» .

Therefore I believe that the greater part of ancient Helike still remains not on sedimentary ground, but on solid rock on the heights and the surrounding area of Trypia (most probably the hill of Aghios Stephanos). It is at this place that archaeological research should be primarily focused. I have high expectations that by searching in this specific area, sufficient clues to help solve the riddle of ancient Helike may well come to light, hereby opening a new and exciting chapter in modern archaeology.

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Abstract

A Contribution to the Search for Ancient Helike

That the riddle of the location of ancient Helike has remained unsolved for so long is due in large part to the influence exerted over subsequent generations of archaeologists by the misinterpretation of sources (Pausanias in particular) and certain misleading theories based on the findings of the French Expédition Scientifique de Morée in 1835.

Pausanias states that ancient Helike lay at a distance of 40 stades (7,4 km) from the ancient city of Aigion (present-day Aigion) and 30 stades (5,5 km) in a direct line from the cave dedicated to Herakles, situated on the

Bouraikos River, near the ancient city of Boura.

Basing their interpretation largely upon this source, the French Expédition de Morée agreed conclusively that the location of ancient Helike was at a point some 7-8 km from present-day Aigion, near the banks of the Selinous River, in or around the present-day villages of Rizomylos, Nikolaiika and Eliki (not to be confused with the ancient city of the same name).

This study argues for an alternative and altogether more plausible interpretation of sources and archaeological findings.

According to Pausanias, the cave honouring Herakles Bouraikos was located near a river. Not only did the established opinion locate the cave at some distance from any river, it placed the location roughly equidistant between two rivers, the present-day Vouraikos and Kerynites, neither of which, despite the name of the former, appear to bear any relation to the ancient city of Boura. According to some indications, this ancient city was probably located 500 m away from the settlement Kastro and near the village of Katholiko. In the light of this proposal, it seems reasonable to suggest that the present-day river of Ladopotamos, flowing east of Katholiko, is in fact the ancient river of Bouraikos. Consequently, the search for the cave of Herakles should focus on one of the banks of this river. Based on the same reasoning, explorations to locate ancient Helike should focus on a site about 5,5 km in a direct line to the west of this cave, namely in the region of «Trypia» and more particularly (a) on a hill now called «Aghios Stephanos», an area mainly around the church of Aghia Irini, (b) in an area along the foot of this hill, where the present-day village of Zachloritika lies, and (c) on the shore to the north of this hill, in the area between the camp site «Elaion» and Cape Trypia, where the sanctuary of Helikonios Poseidon probably once stood.

Therefore, I believe that the greater part of ancient Helike still remains not on sedimentary ground but on solid rock on the heights and surroundings area of «Trypia». It is at this place that archaeological research should be primarily focused.

Περίληψη Συμβολή στην αναζήτηση της Αρχαίας Ελίκης

Όπως είναι γνωστό, η αρχαία Ελίκη υπήρξε, έως την καταστροφή της, μία από τις σημαντικότερες πόλεις της βόρειας Πελοποννήσου, κατέχοντας την πρώτη θέση στην Αχαιική Δωδεκάπολη (το «Κοινό των Αχαιών») και αποτελώντας παράλληλα την εξέχουσα θρησκευτική μητρόπολη των Ιώνων, με επίκεντρο λατρείας το εκεί «ἀγιώτατον ἱερόν» του Ελικωνίου Ποσειδῶνα.

Η Ελίκη κατέρρευσε εκ θεμελίων μια χειμωνιάτικη νύχτα του 373 π.Χ. έπειτα από τρομακτικό σεισμό, η ένταση του οποίου υπολογίστηκε σε 7 Richter, όσο δηλ. και εκείνου που κατέστρεψε τη Ζάκυνθο και την Κεφαλλονιά το 1953. Μάλιστα η καταστροφή ολοκληρώθηκε από ένα τεράστιο παλιρροϊκό κύμα μεγάλης ταχύτητας και ύψους (tsunami), καθώς και από καθίζηση- καταβύθιση μέρους τουλάχιστον της ευρύτερης περιοχής.

Η παρούσα εργασία, που αποτελεί επεξεργασία άλλης παλαιότερης, δημοσιευμένης στο Περισκόπιο της Επιστήμης τον Οκτώβριο 1995 (σελ. 36-49), φιλοδοξεί να εμπλουτίσει την υπάρχουσα βιβλιογραφία με μία νέα ερευνητική προσέγγιση. Βάση της προσέγγισης αυτής συνιστά η σκέψη ότι η αρχαία Ελίκη θα πρέπει να αναζητηθεί όχι στην περιοχή μεταξύ των ποταμών Σελινούντα και Κερυνίτη και δη στα χωριά Ριζόμυλος, Νικολαίικα και σημερινή Ελίκη, όπως υποστηρίζει η κρατούσα άποψη, βασισμένη στις ερμηνείες της Γαλλικής Επιστημονικής Αποστολής στην Πελοπόννησο (1835), αλλ' ανατολικότερα, μεταξύ των ποταμών Κερυνίτη και σημερινού Βουραϊκού. Η υπόθεση αυτή στηρίζεται κυρίως σε ερμηνεία των αρχαίων πηγών και παράλληλη συνεκτίμηση των γεωγραφικών δεδομένων της υπό έρευνα περιοχής.

Κατά τον Πανσανία, η Ελίκη απείχε από το αρχαίο Αίγιο (που ταυτίζεται με το σημερινό) 40 στάδια, δηλ. 7,4 χλμ., και από το Σπήλαιο του Ηρακλή επί του Βουραϊκού ποταμού (σε ευθεία απόσταση) 30 στάδια, δηλ. 5,5 χλμ. (Πανσ. 7.24.5 και 7.25.11), το δε Σπήλαιο του Βουραϊκού Ηρακλή απείχε από την Αιγείρα 72 στάδια, δηλ. 13,3 χλμ. (7.26.1). Έως τις ημέρες μας επικρατεί η άποψη ότι το Σπήλαιο του Βουραϊκού Ηρακλή ταυτίζεται με κάποιο εντυπωσιακό, πράγματι, σπήλαιο κοντά στην παλαιά Εθνική Οδό (165 χλμ. από Αθήνα), περίπου 7 χλμ. από τον Ριζόμυλο και 6 χλμ. από τα Νικολαίικα. Ωστόσο το σπήλαιο αυτό δεν είναι κοντά σε ποταμό, όπως θα έπρεπε να συμβαίνει με βάση το απόσπασμα του Πανσανία, ενώ και η αρχαία πόλη της Βούρας, από την οποία ο Βουραϊκός ποταμός είχε πάρει το όνομά του, βρίσκεται κατά πάσα πιθανότητα όχι κοντά στο χωριό Μαμουσιά, όπως πιστευόταν παλαιότερα, αλλά πολύ ανατολικότερα, κοντά στα χωριά Κάστρο και Καθολικό. Επομένως, ο αρχαίος Βουραϊκός ποταμός θα πρέπει μάλλον να ταυτισθεί με τον σημερινό Λαδοπόταμο, που είναι ο κοντινότερος στην Αρχαία Βούρα, ο δε σήμερα ονομαζόμενος Βουραϊκός ποταμός με τον αρχαίο Ερασίο (Στράβ. 8.8.3).

Αλλ' εάν έτσι έχουν τα πράγματα, τότε το Σπήλαιο του Βουραϊκού Ηρακλή θα πρέπει να τοποθετηθεί στο βόρειο (κάτω) μέρος του Λαδοπόταμου, η δε αρχαία Ελίκη να αναζητηθεί 5,5 χλμ. βορειοδυτικά σε σχέση με τη θέση του Σπηλαιού αυτού (περιοχή «Τρυπιά»), δηλ. στο ύψωμα του

Αγίου Στεφάνου (που πιθανόν να χρησίμευε ως ακρόπολη της αρχαίας Ελίκης), και την κάτω από το ύψωμα αυτό περιοχή, με κύριο άξονα τα χωριά Ζαχλωρίτικα (πιθανή περιοχή κυρίως οικισμού της αρχαίας Ελίκης) και Ελαιώνα (πιθανή περιοχή του ιερού του Ποσειδώνα). Σημειώνεται ότι η περιοχή «Τρυπιά» ταυτίζεται με την αρχαία Ελίκη τόσο σε σχετικό σχόλιο της Γεωγραφίας του Κλαύδιου Πτολεμαίου ('Ελίκη, τὰ Τρυπία [ή: κατά Τρυπία] νῦν ἔρημος) όσο και σε μεταγενέστερες πηγές, π.χ. του 18ου αι. (έτσι Μελέτιος, Γεωγραφία Παλαιά και Νέα, Βενετία 1728).

Εξάλλου στο ίδιο συμπέρασμα ως προς την πιθανή θέση της αρχαίας Ελίκης καταλήγει κανείς, όπως εκτίθεται ειδικότερα στην παρούσα εργασία, και εάν ερμηνεύσει την πορεία που ακολούθησε ο Πανσανίας από το Αίγιο προς την Αιγείρα, καθώς και εάν λάβει υπόψη του το μέγεθος ενδοχώρας που θα έπρεπε να αντιστοιχεί (κατ' ισομοιρία) σε κάθε μία από τις δώδεκα πόλεις του «Κοινού των Αχαιών». Άλλωστε, και από μία επιτόπια εξέταση της περιοχής των «Τρυπιών» εύκολα διαπιστώνει κανείς ότι το ύψωμα του Αγίου Στεφάνου εμφανίζει πράγματι όλα τα χαρακτηριστικά μιας ισχυρής ακρόπολης, με δυνατότητες ύδρευσης, φυσικής αμυντικής θωράκισης και εξασφάλισης διατροφής επί μακρό χρονικό διάστημα για τους εκάστοτε πολιορκημένους, ενώ υπάρχουν και εμφανή σημεία αρχαίων ερειπίων και λιθόστρωτης ατραπού.