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Prasaiboi as an *ethnos* and as a *koinon* across 'old' and 'new' Epirus

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Abstract The Prasaiboi offer a revealing case study in the dynamics of ethnic identity formation, territorial redefinition, and political community-building in post-Pydna Epirus. Documented epigraphically within the framework of the Chaonian *koinon* at Bouthroton around 200 BC, this little-known sub-*ethnos* subsequently became the eponyms of a new political formation (*to koinon ton Prasaibon*), established under Roman aegis before the mid-second century BC, with Bouthroton as its institutional pivot – a trajectory that raises the question of what may have determined their rise from local sub-group to eponyms of a new political formation. The article investigates the multiple connections in which the Prasaiboi are involved with the aim of exploring this question, reassessing various layers of ethnic and territorial affiliation – among which the connection with the Perrhaiboi is here critically re-examined. Particular weight is given to the Thesprotian dimension of Prasaibian identity, preserved in Stephanus of Byzantium's terse designation *ethnos Thesprotikon*, which the article interprets as a form of identity construction in the 'new' Epirus, one that evoked continuity with the archaic, 'Homeric' Epirus as a meaningful framework for political legitimation under Roman aegis.

Keywords Post-Pydna Epirus. Koinon of the Prasaiboi. Bouthroton. Political community formation. Ethnos-koinon. Thesprotia. Perrhaiboi.

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1 The Prasaiboi in the Political Landscape of Epirus and Southern Illyria

The region of Epirus and southern Illyria may offer productive perspectives on the broader theme of plurality and multiscalarity in the organisation of space and the construction of territorial identities in the Greek world. Of special interest in this respect are the local or micro-regional contexts, the interactions between the communities of northern Epirus and southern Illyria, and the processes of political community formation observable within them – among which figures the case examined in this contribution. In the course of my recent and ongoing research, I have sought to highlight how these settings display distinctive dynamics of interaction between the polis and *ethnos-koinon* models, as well as forms of assimilation and osmosis between Greek and non-Greek communities.[1] Like many of these contexts, the *koinon* of the Prasaiboi exhibits interesting institutional and territorial dynamics, which can only be glimpsed from the sparse and difficult-to-interpret data. Admittedly, discursive aspects and identity-forming processes remain largely in the shadow and cannot be the object of direct analysis, given the state of the sources. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume that such factors operated in the background of a particularly striking process – namely, that of a very small *ethnos*, first known through epigraphic documentation in the early second century BC, which at some point was 'reconfigured' into the eponymous group of a new political entity (τὸ κοινὸν τῶν Πρασαιβῶν), established before the middle of the same century under Roman aegis, with the coastal *polis* of Bouthroton as its institutional

1 Cf. Lasagni 2019, 63-4 (esp. on the Dimallitai and Balaieitai); 2025 (esp. on the Bylliones and Balaieitai); Lasagni, forthcoming (esp. on the Aterargoi and Pergamioi, Prasaiboi, and Bylliones).

pivot.[2] Therefore, to use the words of John Davies: Prasaiboi "are to be seen as a construct, not a primordial entity".[3]

When examining the Prasaiboi in terms of their political-institutional organisation, they do not appear markedly different from other small political unions (commonly referred to as *koina*, though not properly comparable to federal states) that emerged during this period. Such unions arose in Central and Northern Greece as the territorial influence of regional powers declined, coinciding with the expansion of Roman authority. Consider, for instance, the *koina* of the Dorians, Oetaeans, Aenianes, and Ozolian Locrians, which developed in the wake of the territorial contraction of the Aetolian state after the treaty of Apamea.[4] In northern Epirus and southern Illyria, this phenomenon appears to have been particularly pronounced. The internal organisation – or even the very existence – of the *koina* of the Bylliones, Dimallitai, and Balaieitai in southern Illyria,[5] as well as the Aterargoi and Pergamioi in Molossia,[6] is known from only a handful of epigraphic attestations (such as public inscriptions, manumission records, roof-tile stamps, or coins). In some cases, our knowledge even relies on a single piece of evidence. Nonetheless, this pattern strongly suggests that such forms of local political organisation were

2 According to Cabanes (1987, 49-56; cf. also 1989, 178-9), the foundation of this new political entity occurred around 163 BC, in connection with a rebellion within the *koinon* of the Epirotes of Phoinike against the despotic rule of the pro-Roman Charops the Younger, and with the intervention of Tiberius Gracchus the Elder among the local Kammanoi (Polyb. 31.1, frg. 1; on the Kammanoi, see below, Section 4). A slightly later date is instead proposed by Drini (1987, 151-8), who, in my opinion, outlines a more convincing context for the formation of the *koinon*. We know that, probably in 160 BC, Charops travelled to Rome in an attempt to obtain official recognition of his authority from the Senate, but his requests were denied once his conduct in Epirus became known. Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, *princeps senatus*, and Lucius Aemilius Paullus even refused to receive him. Upon returning, Charops forged a *senatusconsultum* and presented it to his people as though it were a genuine Roman endorsement. He eventually died in Brundisium in 157 BC, and Epirus once again fell into disorder (Polyb. 32.5-6). It was probably after this event, according to Drini, that the autonomous *koinon* of the Prasaiboi was established. Drini draws attention to a passage in Polybius which he regards as particularly significant in this context, referring to the mission of Gaius Fannius to restore order among the peoples of Dalmatia (Polyb. 32.14.1), which took place between spring and autumn of 157 BC (cf. Walbank 1957, 535). On that occasion, some representatives of Epirus arrived in Rome on behalf of those in power in Phoinike as well as of those in exile. The Senate replied that instructions concerning their land would be delivered to the envoys sent to Illyria with Gaius Marcius, consul in 156 BC.

3 Davies 2000, 255.

4 Cf. *Syll.*[3] 653 = *IK Alexandreia Troas*, 5 (Delphi, ca. 165 BC).

5 For the corpus of inscriptions relevant to these South Illyrian communities, together with an introduction to the associated historical and archaeological context, cf. Cabanes and Drini in *I.Albanie méridionale*, 210-53, 256-65, 266-9. See also above, fn. 1.

6 See below, fn. 11.

more widespread in the region than the extant documentation allows us to perceive today.

These communities institutionalised earlier forms of cooperation and intercommunal identity-building which had remained, so to speak, in the shadow of the great Epirote *ethne*, the Aeacid monarchy, and the Epirote federal state (232-168 BC) – subsequently crystallising them in the form of the *koinon*. Most of these communities were newly constituted following the dissolution of the Epirote federation and emerged under the aegis of the Roman protectorate. They blended organisational forms, settlement patterns, and political institutions characteristic of both the polis and *ethnos* models. These were *ethne*, or systems of *ethne*, structured around urban centres – often founded or developed in the Hellenistic period in the typical form of a *polis Hellenis*, with *stoai*, theatres, *gymnasia*, and other such features. They adopted institutions that linked them both to the Epirote tradition – such as the dual leadership of the *strategos* and *prostatas* – and to the Corinthian-polis tradition, as evidenced by the widespread presence of the *prytanis*.[7]

The same pattern can be observed in the case of the Prasaiboi: they appear in inscriptions as the political entity designated as Πρασαιβοί or τὸ κοινὸν τῶν Πρασαιβῶν, headed by *strategoi* and *prostatai*.[8] Their organisation centred on an urban hub, Bouthroton, that served as the location for the public display of their decrees and, possibly, the seat of their decision-making bodies. The ethnics preserved in the epigraphic record indicate that they brought together a wide range of sub-groups – some of which emerge for the first time in the inscriptions of Bouthroton, while others can be traced back to the Chaonian, Molossian, or Thesprotian *ethne* previously attested in the 'republican' Epirote *koinon* or the monarchical Epirus.[9]

7 On the role of 'institutional isomorphism' in the development of Hellenised political communities in South Illyria, cf. Lasagni 2025, 288-97.

8 *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 9 (proxeny decree of the Prasaiboi for a man from Teos), cf. ll. 1-4: διαλεγέντος Σωκλέος τοῦ Γλαυκία Ἐσσυρίου | περὶ προξενίας Χαιρίαι τῶι Διοσκουρίδα Τηΐωι, | καὶ ἀπολογισαμένου ἂν ἔχων εὔνοιαν διατελεῖ | εἰς τὸ κοινὸν τῶμ Πρασαιβῶν, cf. with ll. 7-9: ἔδοξε | τᾶι βουλᾶι καὶ τᾶι ἐκκλησίαι τῶμ Πρασαιβῶν ἐπαινέ|σαι ἐπί [τε τᾶι] ε[ὐ]νοία[ι τᾶ]ι εἰς τοὺς Πρασαιβούς. On the institutions of the *koinon* of the Prasaiboi, cf. Cabanes 1989, 147-83; 1998, 25-7; Cabanes in *I.Bouthrôtos*, 242-8.

9 For instance, the Aigidorioi: two individuals bearing this ethnic name are attested respectively in a manumission record from Phoinike – as *prostatas* of the Chaonian *koinon* (Cabanes, *L'Épire*, 574-6 no. 48, l. 3, ca. 230-200 BC) – and in a record from Bouthroton, as *hiereus* of Asklepios (*I.Bouthrôtos* no. 39, l. 1, after 163 BC). The Kyestoi: individuals bearing this ethnic name appear both in the context of the Molossian *koinon* – through the double ethnic Μολοσσός Κυεστός, in two honorary bases from Dodona (Cabanes, *L'Épire*, 46 nos 14-15, issued respectively by the *koinon* of the Bylliones and the *koinon* of the Epirotes, late third century BC), and as *prostatas* of the Molossian *koinon* (*I.Molossie* no. 177, see below, fn. 11) – and in manumission records from the *koinon* of the Prasaiboi at Bouthroton (*I.Bouthrôtos* nos 69, 70, 71: Kyestoi as

From this perspective, the Prasaiboi may be regarded as a typical political formation of the region – both synchronically, in comparison with other *koina* of the Illyro-Epirote area formed progressively after the dissolution of the Epirote monarchy (232 BC) and, more significantly, the collapse of the Epirote federal state (168 BC); and diachronically, in continuity with the institutional legacy of the Epirote *koinon*. Nonetheless, within this broader framework, the Prasaiboi display a number of peculiarities that merit closer examination, with all critical issues emerging from the epigraphic evidence.

Although the inscriptions from Bouthroton – primarily manumission records – reveal an exceptionally high number of sub-groups,[10] both in the onomastics of private individuals and public officials, the Prasaiboi themselves cannot apparently be counted among the major Epirote *ethne*, nor even among those with a weakly attested political identity prior to the mid-second century BC – such as the Aterargoi, a subgroup of the Molossian *koinon* settled in the Ioannina basin.[11] Moreover, apart from a brief reference in Stephanus of Byzantium (to which we will return below), the Prasaiboi are attested exclusively through inscriptions from Bouthroton, and only from a relatively late date – from around 200 BC – unlike several other sub-*ethne* mentioned in the Bouthroton corpus, which, as noted above, also appear in documents from earlier phases of the Chaonian and Molossian *koina*, or in inscriptions related to the Epirote federal state.[12]

The inscriptions also appear to testify to a two-tier usage of Πρασαιβός in public epigraphy. In the great majority of occurrences, the plural ethnonym – predominantly in the genitive plural, in formulas such as τὸ κοινὸν τῶν Πρασαιβῶν or ὁ στρατηγὸς τῶν Πρασαιβῶν – designates the political community as a whole. In two inscriptions, however, this political usage of Πρασαιβοί coexists with the indication of Πρασαιβός applied to individual persons, where this ethnic seems instead to denote their membership in a local sub-*ethnos* within the wider political union of the Prasaiboi; these

martyres). The Opatai/Opatoi: the ethnic associated with this sub-*ethnos* appears in a dedication to Zeus Naios and Diona by the *princeps Epirotarum* Charops the Elder (so Liv. 32.11.1), where he is designated as Θεσπρωτὸς Ὀπατός (*I.Molossie* no. 64, ca. 219-191 BC). It is also attested in several inscriptions from Bouthroton, including instances in which it accompanies the names of *strategoi* or *prostatai* of the Prasaiboi (*I.Bouthrôtos* nos 111-113, 152*; I.Bouthrôtos* nos 117-20, 127, 135, 168).

10 About ninety, cf. Cabanes in *I.Bouthrôtos*, 197-203 (*Index des libres par ethnique*).

11 This local political community, referred to as Ἀτέραργοι / τὸ κοινὸν τῶν Ἀτεράργων, is known solely from a decree dating to the period of 'republican' Epirus (*I.Molossie* no. 177, late third-early second century BC), concerning the renewal of *proxenia* and *philia* ties with the neighbouring sub-*ethnos* of the Pergamioi. For a reappraisal of this inscription, and of the identity and organisational framework of the Aterargoi and the Pergamioi, cf. Lasagni, forthcoming.

12 *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 1, ll. 3-4 (cf. below, fn. 16).

individuals are listed together with others who likewise bear sub-ethnics, confirming that the reference operates at this more specific level.[13] This distinction is noteworthy, since ethnics referring to broader groupings are generally omitted at the local level, where they are considered self-evident. For instance, the *strategos* of the Epirote *koinon*, Eualkos – belonging to a Molossian sub-tribe – is designated by a local ethnic in an inscription from Dodona (within the context of the Molossian *koinon*), whereas in a contemporary inscription from Bouthroton (within the frame of the Chaonian *koinon*) he is associated with the broader Molossian *ethnos*.[14] In view of the pattern here observed, the presence of individuals designated as Πρασαιβός in inscriptions issued under the authority of the Prasaibian *koinon* at Bouthroton may suggest that the collective ethnonym and the individual ethnic relate to two not entirely overlapping levels of collective identity. The presence of individuals bearing the ethnic Πρασαιβός in inscriptions emanating from the *koinon* of the Prasaiboi could, in theory, be explained also by hypothesising that these persons had received citizenship from the Prasaiboi and designated themselves simply as Πρασαιβοί, without further affiliation to one of the sub-*ethne* originally incorporated into the *koinon*. This kind of explanation, however, finds no evident support – not least because the surviving documentation gives no information about the Prasaiboi's *politeia*, nor about any differentiated levels of rights or affiliations that its exercise may have involved; the former interpretation – although equally difficult to prove – fits more convincingly both with the evidently composite character of the population of the newly formed *koinon* of the Prasaiboi and with the attested pre-existence of the Prasaiboi as a local sub-*ethnos* of Bouthroton within the earlier *koinon* of the Chaones.[15]

13 In this regard, cf. the manumission records *I.Bouthrôtos* nos 56 and 92, from the *diazoma* of the theatre and from the so-called 'Tower of the Inscriptions' respectively, in which the prescript mentions the στρατηγὸς τῶν Πρασαιβῶν, while a number of witnesses are collectively identified by the ethnic Πρασαιβοί. Even more significant is *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 60 also from the *diazoma* of the *theatre*, where the ethnic Πρασαιβοί, qualifying the family group of manumissors, is accompanied by three *martyres* bearing a different local ethnic (Καμμανοὶ Βουθρώτιοι, on which see below, Section 4).

14 *I.Molossie* no. 101, ll. 1-6: στ̣ρ̣α̣τ̣α̣γ̣οῦ̣ν̣τ̣ος Ἀ[πει]|ρωτᾶν Εὐάλκου Ἀ|ριαντέος, προστατεύ|οντος δὲ | Μολοσσῶ|ν Πολυκλείτου Ὀσσονίου; *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 1, ll. 1-4: στραταγο[ῦ]ν[τος Ἀ]πειρωτᾶν Εὐάλκου Μολοσσοῦ, προστα[τοῦντ]ος | δὲ Χαόνων Λυκίδα Ἐ̣λ̣ι̣ν̣νοῦ, [ἱερέο]ς δὲ | Ἀσκλαπιοῦ Σαώτα Πρασαιβοῦ.

15 As a methodological point of reference, it may be useful to recall the case of individuals bearing the ethnic Ῥόδιος in Hellenistic Rhodes: the employment of this 'self-evident' ethnic had long been explained as the mark of naturalised citizens with limited rights (and no deme-affiliation), yet Gabrielsen (1994, 43-69; cf. Fraser 2009, 83) has shown that it was in fact borne above all by a restricted cluster of sculptors' families – among whom individuals of non-Rhodian descent formed only a small minority – and is therefore better understood as a social and professional marker

In addition, the inscriptions of Bouthroton reveal a noteworthy coexistence – apparently on equal footing and with overlapping roles – of ethnic designations with differing scales and origins. These include Πρασαιβός (referring to the sub-*ethnos*), Βουθρώτιος (linked to the polis that became the institutional centre of the new *koinon* and already attested in inscriptions issued within the Chaonian *koinon*), Κεστρεῖνος (referring to the region of Kestrine, located south of Bouthroton, between the Thyamis (Kalamas) and the Pavllë rivers – an area variously attributed by ancient sources to Chaonia or Thesprotia), and Καμμανὸς Βουθρώτιος (a compound ethnic indicating origin from Kammania, a Thesprotian sub-region which, according to Stephanus, received also the name Kestrine).[16] This constellation of ethnics within the onomastic record of the Prasaiboi paints a picture of considerable complexity – one that resists straightforward reconciliation with the 'federative' model traditionally ascribed to the internal organisation of the Epirote state, structured as a regular hierarchical system of *ethne* and sub-*ethne*.[17]

Finally, the ethnic composition of the *koinon* of the Prasaiboi – formed under the aegis of Roman control – cannot be understood solely in relation to the human geography of the Bouthroton region, but should rather be interpreted also in light of the devastation inflicted upon Epirus by Aemilius Paullus and the subsequent migration of

shaped by local epigraphic practice. An analysis attentive to such contextual nuances is all the more relevant to the complex landscape of the Epirote *ethne*, where it is essential to distinguish ethnic identifiers used in reference to political entities from those borne by individuals, and, among the latter, especially by private persons, whose motivations for employing a given ethnic do not necessarily or mechanically reflect juridical statuses connected with the organisation of the *politeia*. Even in the case of office-holders, the rationale behind the choice of an ethnic is not always transparent, and one may still need to ask – in Davies's words – "whether, for the purposes of the political administrative processes […], the identifiers served as quasi-surnames or as labels for constituencies" (2000, 255).

16 *Prasaibos*: see above, fn. 13. *Bouthrotios*: individuals bearing this ethnic are, as expected, widely attested in the local manumission records from Bouthroton, where they regularly appear as *martyres*; Bouthrotioi witnesses are also recorded in *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 1, issued around 200 BC in the context of the *koinon* of the Chaones. *Kestreinos*: cf. especially *I.Bouthrôtos* nos 16, 25, 31, and 41, in which Kestreinoi hold the priesthood of Asklepios. *Kammanos Bouthrotios*: individuals bearing this double ethnic are attested as *martyres* solely in the manumission record *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 60.

17 This relates to the 'nested-box' structure of the Epirote *koinon*, as classically proposed by Pierre Cabanes; cf. esp. Cabanes 1976, 380-3. For the formation, etymology, and semantics of the ethnics attested in the epigraphic documentation of Bouthroton, cf. Lhôte 2011, 105-12; for the broader landscape of Epirote ethnics, cf. Filos 2018, 283-301, who notes in particular that – unlike the names of the major Epirote *ethne*, whose etymology remains highly elusive – "minor ethnics (tribes, clans), such as those found at Bouthrotos, are semantically more transparent. This may (partly) be due to the later date of their formation and/or to the fact that they have been built on well-known appellatives on some occasions".

individual family groups into this comparatively protected area in the aftermath of the Third Macedonian war.[18]

The questions arising from this context are numerous, but the most relevant concerns the identity of the Prasaiboi as both an *ethnos* and a *koinon*. More specifically, one must ask why this new political entity – centred on the coastal polis of Bouthroton, originally founded as a settlement of the Corcyraean *peraea* and now newly elevated to a central position at the expense of former key centres such as Phoinike and Antigoneia –[19] adopted the name of the otherwise unknown group of the Prasaiboi, whose prior connection with Bouthroton is attested solely by a single inscription mentioning a Prasaibos serving as *hiereus* of Asklepios.[20] To attempt an answer, it is useful to examine the various connections – ethnic, geographical, and political – in which the Prasaiboi are involved, as revealed by the sources.

2 Thesprotian Prasaiboi

As mentioned above, the only ancient source that explicitly names the Prasaiboi (here with a double sigma) is a concise entry by Stephanus of Byzantium (*Ethn*. π-234): Πράσσαιβοι· ἔθνος Θεσπρωτικόν.

From the late Classical period, the territory of Thesprotia extended across the coastal zone of Epirus, stretching from the Gulf of Ambracia and the lower course of the Acheron northwards to the Thyamis River, which marked the boundary with Chaonia.[21] The Thesprotians were one of the three major Epirote *ethne*, alongside the Chaonians and the Molossians, and appear in ancient sources as the most prominent of the Epirote tribes in earlier times, being the only one mentioned in the Homeric poems, where they are associated with the *nekyomanteion*.[22] Originally, Thesprotia seems to have extended

18 This is suggested by the exceptionally large number of ethnics attested in the inscriptions of the *koinon* of the Prasaiboi (partly traceable, as noted, to Thesprotian, Chaonian, and also Molossian groups – the latter, such as the Kyestoi, originating from the upper valley of the Thyamis). This remarkable variety of ethnics cannot be mechanically interpreted as corresponding to local sub-*ethne* settled throughout the territory of the *koinon*, but in many cases can be more properly understood as reflecting family clans established at Bouthroton and its immediate surroundings, and integrated into the *politeia* of the Prasaiboi; cf. Ceka 2001, 184; Bogdani 2022, 89. On this point, see, for instance, the case – by no means unique – of the Essyrioi, whose numerous attestations in the inscriptions of Bouthroton can all be traced back to the same family group, discussed by Cabanes 2000, 59-69.

19 Cf. Melfi, Piccinini 2012, 45.

20 *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 1, ll. 3-4: [ἱερέο]ς δὲ | Ἀσκλαπιοῦ Σαώτα Πρασαιβοῦ.

21 Cf. Cabanes, *L'Épire* 114-15; Lazari, Kanta-Kitsou 2010, 35-6.

22 For an in-depth analysis of the 'underworld tradition' of Thesprotia and of its significance in the construction of a pan-Thesprotian identity, cf. Mancini 2017, 203-41.

further eastward, encompassing the upper course of the Acheloos, Mount Tomaros, and the ancient oracle of Zeus at Dodona – a territory that was subsequently affected by the expansion of the Molossian kingdom.[23] By the mid-fourth century BC, the Thesprotians had suffered significant territorial losses, but they had also expanded at the expense of the neighbouring Chaonians to the north of the Thyamis (Kalamas) river, in south Kestrine, where the polis of Gitana was founded as the centre of a new (or reorganised) political entity of the Θεσπρωτοί.[24] The attestations of the Thesprotians as an autonomous political entity organised as a *koinon* between the mid-fourth and the second centuries BC are scarce and often problematic, allowing only a cautious reconstruction of their institutional development. In the period around 335-330/325 BC, the Thesprotians produced an autonomous coinage bearing the legend ΘΕ[ΣΠΡΩΤΩΝ], which may be seen as a temporary response to the broad geopolitical reconfiguration of the Epirote area during the fourth century BC, shaped by the expansive pressure exerted by the Aeacid monarchy.[25] For the Hellenistic period, the direct evidence for the functioning of a Thesprotian *koinon* is quite scarce, and many aspects remain debated – not least the precise role played by the Thesprotians within

23 *Nekyomanteion*: Hom. *Od*. 14.314-320; 16.425-427 (for the Homeric references to Thesprotia, cf. Domínguez 2019, 339-41); Hdt. 5.92. Dodona (cf. Domínguez 2019, 344-50): cf. Eur. *Phoen*. 982; Aesch. *PV* 829-831; Strab. 7.7.11: "In ancient times, then, Dodona was under the rule of the Thesprotians; and so was Mount Tomarus, or Tmarus (for it is called both ways), at the base of which the temple is situated. And both the tragic poets and Pindar have called Dodona 'Thesprotian Dodona'. But later on, it came under the rule of the Molossi" (transl. H.L. Jones, *Loeb Classical Library* 1917). Although the chronology of the Molossian expansion over Dodona remains uncertain, it may be assumed that the sanctuary and its surrounding territory came under Molossian control by the late fifth or early fourth century BC (Domínguez 2019, 354 and fn. 71; Chapinal-Heras 2021, 21-2). Before this point, during the fifth century, the Thesprotians appear to have been overshadowed by a Chaonian hegemony, the organisational features of which are difficult to define, but which is likely to underlie the reports of Thuc. 2.68.9 (Χάονες καὶ ἄλλοι τινὲς τῶν πλησιοχώρων βαρβάρων, 'The Chaonians and some other neighbouring barbarian peoples', as allies of the Ambraciots, cf. Hellan. *FGrH* 4 F 83) and Theopomp. *FGrH* 115 F 382 (Theopompus says that there are fourteen peoples of the Epirotes; of these the most renowned are the Chaonians and the Molossians, because they once ruled over the whole of Epirus, first the Chaonians, and later the Molossians; Author's transl.), cf. Pascual 2018, 55-7; Bogdani 2022, 94-5; Cabanes and Drini in *I.Albanie méridionale*, 23-4.

24 On the history and archaeology of Gitana, cf. Kanta-Kitsou 2008 (esp. 20-1 on the city's foundation). Cf. the *theorodokoi* list of Epidauros (*IG* IV² 1, 95, col. I, ll. 26-7), dated to 354 BC (Perlman 2000, 72-3), where the Θεσπρωτοί are mentioned among the political communities – *poleis* and *ethne* – of the region of the Ἄπειρος, together with Χαονία and Μολοσσοί (for a concise overview, with further references, on the use of the *theorodokoi* lists as evidence for the communities' status as autonomous political entities, see Hansen, Nielsen 2004, 103-6).

25 Franke 1961, 47-51. Cf. Domínguez 2019, 355. On the adoption of the Elaean type with Persephone and Cerberus in the Thesprotian coinage, cf. Mancini 2017, 208-9.

the organisational structure of the 'republican' Epirote federation (232-167 BC).[26] Yet several pieces of evidence from Gitana constitute indications for a continued political activity of the Thesprotians, beginning with the significant reference to a προστάτας Θεσπρωτῶν as eponymous magistrate in the dating formula of a manumission on a stone stele from the site.[27] The construction at Gitana, around the mid-third century BC, of the 'meeting hall' in Building E and of the theatre – the latter also interpreted as a venue used for political assemblies – suggests a growing vitality in the Thesprotian capital and may offer an argument, albeit indirectly, against Cabanes' view that the Thesprotian *koinon* was reduced to a marginal position within the overall organisation of the Epirote federation.[28] The more than three thousand seals recovered from various rooms of the *Building A* (the so-called 'Prytaneion-public archive') of Gitana attest to intense administrative activity and to a dense network of exchanges with cities and larger and smaller *koina* of Epiros, Aetolia, Illyria, and Macedonia.[29] Within this context, the presence of seals bearing the legend ΘΕΣΠΡΩΤΩΝ is particularly significant, as it provides the clearest evidence of ongoing politico-administrative activity involving the Thesprotians before the destruction carried out by Aemilius Paullus in 167 BC.[30] Nonetheless, while the hypothesis

26 As is well known, Cabanes interpreted the 'republican' Epirote state as a two-headed federation centred on the Molossian and Chaonian *koina*, with the Thesprotians relegated to a second-level community – a view that takes its starting point especially from the Delphic *theorodokoi* list (with its stops at Dodona and Phoinike) and is, in his reading, reflected in the later split of the *koinon* during the Third Macedonian War between a pro-Macedonian Molossian side and a pro-Roman Chaonian one; cf. esp. Cabanes 1976, 379-83; Cabanes in *I.Molossie*, 158-62. Against this reconstruction, and in support of a continued role of the Thesprotian *koinon* alongside those of the Molossians and Chaonians within the Epirote federation, cf. esp. Kontorini 1999, 279-80; Meyer 2013, 104-13; Pascual 2018, 86-7. More recently, Cabanes 2019, 93-119, has offered a fuller re-examination of the evidence concerning the development of the Thesprotian community throughout the Hellenistic period, adopting a more nuanced approach that, without reinstating the 'two-headed' model, nonetheless reinforces the idea of a shifting degree of Thesprotian political autonomy and of its re-emergence after the disintegration of the Epirote *koinon* in 170 BC.

27 Cabanes, *L'Épire*, 576-7, no. 49, ll. 1-5: Ἀγαθᾶι τύχαι· ἐπὶ προ[σ]τάτα Θεσπρωτῶν Ἀλε|ξάνδρου, ἱερέος δὲ Φυ|σταῖου, μηνὸς Γαμιλί|ου. Dated to the mid-fourth century (cf. esp. Kontorini 1987, 629 no. 13; Cabanes 2019, 616-17 no. 2), while Meyer 2013, 162-3 no. 28 lowers the date to 290-167 BC.

28 Theatre: Kanta-Kitsou 2008, 59-60; Lazari and Kanta-Kitsou 2010, 45-6; Rinaldi 2018a, 260. On the 'meeting hall' of *Building E* cf. Rinaldi 2021, 377-8.

29 Cf. Preka-Alexandri 1989, 171 fig. 14; Kontorini 1999, 285 fig. 1; Preka-Alexandri, Stoyas 2011, 677-81. *Building A* at Gitana, located near the theatre, is best understood not as a mere '*prytaneion*' or 'public archive', but as a centrally placed representative and governmental complex that accommodated the most important political and administrative activities of civic and federal bodies, cf. Rinaldi 2018a, 260-1 and fig. 8.

30 Polyb. 30.15.1; Liv. 45.33.8-34.9; Strab. 7.7.5.

of a systematic obliteration of the Thesprotians within a bipartite Epirote *koinon* organised around the two Molossian and Chaonian 'regional' *koina* may appear excessively mechanical – and partly rests on *argumenta ex silentio* – it remains true that the reconstruction of the political role of the Thesprotians in this phase is based on quite scant and problematic evidence. The important corpus of the *bullae* from the *Building A* of Gitana offers, above all, a view of the politico-administrative and diplomatic life of the Thesprotian polis (at least fourteen seals bear the name Γίτανα), confirming its prominent role among the federal capitals;[31] yet none of the seals, apart from the small group with the legend ΘΕΣΠΡΩΤΩΝ, can be securely connected with politico-administrative bodies or officials of a Thesprotian *koinon*.[32] Moreover, for the republican period we possess no epigraphic documents that define the position of the Thesprotians within the federal government as clearly as the public inscriptions of the Molossians and the Chaonians, whose prescripts regularly display compound dating formulas such as "στραταγοῦντος Ἀπειρωτᾶν (name) προστατοῦντος δὲ Χαόνων/Μολοσσῶν (name)". Finally, it should be noted that the only possible reference to a κοινὸν τῶν Θεσπρωτῶν is a restored passage in a fragmentary honorific inscription on a bronze plaque from Dodona, in which the Thesprotians appear to honour the *agonothetes* of the Naia together with the *Naikoi euthynoi*.[33] The proposed dates for this scant piece of evidence vary considerably and are therefore problematic to use as a secure indicator for tracing any evolution in the Thesprotians' political configuration. Nonetheless, Cabanes' hypothesis of a late

31 At least one meeting of the *synedrion* of the Epirotes was held at Gitana, in 171 BC, as attested by Livy (42.38). Cf. the sealings from Gitana bearing the legends ΑΠΕΙΡΩΤΑΝ (thunderbolt within oak-wreath) and ΣΥΝΕΔΡΩΝ (head of Zeus), which are connected with the politico-administrative activity of the federal government of the Epirotes (see above, fn. 29).

32 In this respect, particular consideration should be given to the group of sealings bearing the legend ΒΟΥΛΑΣ (female head): the absence of any specification of this *boula* – contrast, for instance, the bull-butting sealings with the legend ΒΟΥΛΑΣ ΧΑ(ΟΝΩΝ) – makes it impossible to determine whether this body belonged to the *koinon* of the Epirotes (cf. Kontorini 1999, 279), to that of the Thesprotians, or, not least, to the city of Gitana itself.

33 *I.Molossie*, no. 113: - - -]ν ἀγωνοθέ[ταν] | [Ἀν]δρομάχου [- -] | [τὸ κοινὸν τ]ῶν Θεσπρωτ[ῶν] | [καὶ] τοὶ ναϊκοὶ εὔ[θυνοι] | [- - - - - ἔν]εκα. On the chronology of the inscription (post-167 BC), cf. Cabanes 2019, 613 and 627 no. 13. For a discussion of the various dates proposed, cf. also Meyer 2013, 108-10, who places the text "sometime between 232 and 167 BC", but rightly stresses that the surviving portion of l. 1 cannot be interpreted as a dating formula, as erroneously argued by Cabanes. In my view, the edition of the inscription rests on an incorrect division of the surviving lines: the dedication most likely began already in l. 1 with the accusative of the honourand [τὸ]ν ἀγωνοθέ[ταν, while Ἀν]δρομάχου should be taken as a patronymic, which implies that there was originally space between the surviving text of l. 1 and that of l. 2 for the personal name of the *agonothetes* in the accusative.

chronology, after 167 BC, still deserves some consideration; the phase of political redefinition in the aftermath of Pydna – following the disruption of the Epirote federation and the devastation of its pro-Macedonian components, predominantly Molossian,[34] and the same phase that saw the emergence of the *koinon* of the Prasaiboi – might offer a plausible context for this renewed visibility of the Thesprotians, through the honorific initiative attested in the inscription, within the sanctuary of Dodona.[35]

The only traceable connection involving the Prasaiboi prior to the foundation of the homonymous political entity is their association with the Hellenistic *koinon* of the Chaonians, of which Bouthroton was a part, subordinate to the Chaonian capital Phoinike. That said – and leaving aside the elusive developments in Thesprotian political organisation around Gitana – a placement of the Prasaiboi among the *ethne* of the Thesprotian group remains feasible, not only because of the internal dynamics of aggregation within the *koinon* of the Prasaiboi, which, as noted above, point to a heterogeneous ethnic composition. Attention should also be drawn in this respect to the status of Kestrine, which was an important part of the territory associated with the new political formation. This region was characterised by its position as a borderland between Thesprotia and Chaonia, and was historically marked by complex dynamics of territorial redefinition between the two relevant *ethne*.[36] The inscriptions of the *koinon* of the Prasaiboi document presence of both the ethnic Kestr(e)inos and Kammanos, this last in the compound form Kammanos Bouthrotios.[37] According to a lemma in Stephanus of Byzantium, Kammania was originally a region of Thesprotia, which was also called Kestrine, deriving its name from the founding hero Kestrinos, son of the Priamid Helenos.[38] As Julian Bogdani has recently highlighted, the multiple Trojan associations displayed by this area can be seen as the outcome of early Chaonian claims over

34 Strab. 7.7.5.

35 Cabanes 2019, 627-30, also assigns to the period following the dissolution of the Epirote unity in 170 BC a recently discovered bronze plaque from Gitana, recording a dedication by a grandmother consecrating her young grandson to Themis. The dating formula refers to a local *prostatas* (ἐπὶ πρ(οστάτα) Λυσανία τοῦ Μενεφύλου Καμμανοῦ, ll. 1-2), who belonged to the Thesprotian *ethnos* of the Kammanoi (on this inscription, see below, Section 4), and should be understood, according to Cabanes, as *prostatas* of the *koinon* of the Thesprotians.

36 Cf. Bogdani 2022, 87-102.

37 Kestr(e)inos: *I.Bouthrôtos* 16, 25, 31, 68; Kestrinos Barrhios: *I.Bouthrôtos* 41; Kestreinos Asantos: *Bouthrôtos* 91. Kammanos Bouthrotios: *I.Bouthrôtos* 60.

38 St. Byz. *Ethn.*, κ-49 *s.v.* Καμμανία, quoted in fn. 60).

this Thesprotian territory,[39] a tradition that, precisely because of its resonance with Roman ideology – where the myth of Trojan ancestry held powerful legitimising value and symbolic appeal – became a potentially significant ideological resource in forging relations with Rome, an aspect that seems to emerge particularly in the political fragmentation of Epirus following 170 BC, within the context of the Third Macedonian War and the pro-Roman politics of the κοινὸν τῶν Ἠπειρωτῶν τῶν περὶ Φοινίκην under Charops the Younger.[40]

If in this context Kestrine appears to have been associated with Chaonia – also through the ideological use of unifying traditions – the subsequent period nevertheless witnesses a renewed and expanded attribution of the region to the Thesprotian sphere. In the second century AD, Claudius Ptolemy, reflecting in many respects the human geography of late Hellenistic mainland Greece, assigns the Thesprotians the entire coastal strip from Cape Poseidon (Akra Skala), northwest of the colony of Bouthroton, down to Nikopolis and the mouth of the Acheloos, with Cape Poseidon and the Corcyraean Strait, marked by the harbour of Kassiope (Κασσιόπη λιμήν), serving as the dividing line with Chaonian territory to the north.[41]

Leaving aside these latter aspects for the moment, there exists an additional meaning of Θεσπρωτικός that we need to consider, one that partly overlaps with the previous sense and is also attested in

39 Cf. also St. Byz. *Ethn.*, τ-205 *s.v.* Τροία: ἔστι καὶ πόλις ἐν Κεστρίᾳ τῆς Χαονίας. At the end of the fifth century BC, according to Thuc. 1.46.6, the river Thyamis marked the boundary between Thesprotia and Kestrine, the latter evidently not being considered part of the former at that time. This situation appears to have changed in the following century, as indicated by Ps.-Scyl. 29: Ἐπιβάλλει δὲ Κόρκυρα καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν Θεσπρωτίαν πλεῖον ἢ ἐπὶ τὴν Χαονίαν (Corcyra extends more towards Thesprotia than towards Chaonia). Cf. also *Schol. in Ar. Pax* 925: Ἐν δὲ τῇ Χαονίᾳ φασὶ τοιούτους εἶναι βοῦς, οὓς καὶ Κεστρινοὺς καλοῦσιν (In Chaonia, they say, there are cattle of such a kind, which they also call Kestrinoi).

40 Bogdani 2022, 98-101, esp. 101: "Once again, after many years, the connections of Kestrine with Chaonia seem to prevail over those with Thesprotia. It is plausible that the architect of this policy, Charops the Younger, who originated from the region north of the Thyamis and had spent some years of his youth in Rome, also grounded his *realpolitik* in the Trojan origins shared with the new masters" (Author's transl.). Individuals bearing the ethnic Opatos/Opatas are frequently attested in the inscriptions from Bouthroton. They formed a Thesprotian sub-*ethnos*, as confirmed by a dedication to Zeus and Diona from Dodona by Χάροψ Μαχάτα Θεσπρωτὸς Ὀπατός, who is to be identified with Charops the Elder (active between 219 and 191 BC), grandfather of the Epirote leader Charops the Younger. Most probably, the Opatai are to be located in the Thesprotian area north of the Thyamis River (cf. Dakaris 1968, 51-3; Cabanes 1994, 175-8).

41 Ptol. *Geog.* 3.14.2-4: Χαονίας: Ὠρικόν […], ἡ ἀκρώρεια τῶν Ἀκροκεραυνίων ὀρέων […], Πάνορμος λιμήν […], Ὄγχησμὸς λιμήν […], Κασσιόπη λιμήν […]. Ἡ δ' ἀπὸ μεσημβρίας πλευρὰ τῷ ἐντεῦθεν μέχρι τοῦ Ἀχελῴου ποταμοῦ Ἀδριατικῷ πελάγει κατὰ περιγραφὴν τῆς παραλίου τοιαύτην: Θεσπρωτῶν: Ποσείδιον ἄκρον […], Βουθρωτὸν κολωνία […], Πηλώδης λιμήν […], Θύαμις ἄκρα […], Θυάμιος ποταμοῦ ἐκβολαί […], Τορώνη […], Σύβοτα λιμήν […], Ἀχέροντος ποταμοῦ ἐκβολαί […], Ἐλαίας λιμήν […]. Cf. Roller 2023, 91.

Stephanus of Byzantium. In this context, Θεσπρωτικός functions as a general designation for the most ancient tribes of the Epirus region. Apart from the 'western' Perrhaiboi mentioned in the Iliad – to whom I shall return – the prosperous Thesprotians are the only ones among the historically attested Epirote *ethne* to appear in Homer, as noted above.[42] Regarding the ethnic groups of Epirus, Stephanus seems to rely on literary traditions that merge Homeric representations of the archaic Thesprotians with the historical human geography of Epirus. In several entries concerning Thesprotian *ethne*, Stephanus draws on Rhianus' *Thessalika*, in which the qualification of Θεσπρωτικός is used for tribes that had long been established in the Epirote mainland, but whose reach extended to include the territories of Thessaly. As Dakaris has observed, when we speak of 'Thesprotians' in western Thessaly, we should not interpret this as a reflection of political expansion of this *ethnos*, but rather as the echo of an ancient tradition – endorsed by the authority of Herodotus – according to which the Thessalians originally came to Thessaly from the land of the Thesprotians.[43]

The lemma on the Prasaiboi in the *Ethnika* is extremely concise and provides no additional information or literary references – in particular, it contains no explicit mention of Rhianus, unlike other entries on 'Thesprotian' communities.[44] However, this does not completely preclude the possibility that the qualification Θεσπρωτικός is used here in the same sense attested in other entries derived from Rhianus – not as an indication of human geography in a strict sense, but perhaps as a reflection of a local historical tradition crystallised

42 Cf. Hom. *Od*. 17.526, 19.271: Θεσπρωτῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐν πίονι δήμῳ. Cf. Paus. 1.17.5: γῆς δὲ τῆς Θεσπρωτίδος ἔστι μέν που καὶ ἄλλα θέας ἄξια, ἱερόν τε Διὸς ἐν Δωδώνῃ καὶ ἱερὰ τοῦ θεοῦ φηγός· πρὸς δὲ τῇ Κιχύρῳ λίμνη τέ ἐστιν Ἀχερουσία καλουμένη καὶ ποταμὸς Ἀχέρων, ῥεῖ δὲ καὶ Κωκυτὸς ὕδωρ ἀτερπέστατον. Ὅμηρός τέ μοι δοκεῖ ταῦτα ἑωρακὼς ἔς τε τὴν ἄλλην ποίησιν ἀποτολμῆσαι τῶν ἐν Ἅιδου καὶ δὴ καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα τοῖς ποταμοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν Θεσπρωτίδι θέσθαι (Among the sights of Thesprotia are a sanctuary of Zeus at Dodona and an oak sacred to the god. Near Cichyrus is a lake called Acherusia, and a river called Acheron. There is also Cocytus, a most unlovely stream. I believe it was because Homer had seen these places that he made bold to describe in his poems the regions of Hades, and gave to the rivers there the names of those in Thesprotia; transl. W.H.S. Jones, *Loeb Classical Library* 1919). See above, fn. 23.

43 Hdt. 7.176.4: ἔδειμαν δὲ Φωκέες τὸ τεῖχος δείσαντες, ἐπεὶ Θεσσαλοὶ ἦλθον ἐκ Θεσπρωτῶν οἰκήσοντες γῆν τὴν Αἰολίδα τήν νῦν ἐκτέαται (The Phocians built the wall for fear, as the Thessalians had come from the land of the Thesprotians to settle in the Aeolian land which they now inhabit; Author's transl). Dakaris 1957, 107-8; cf. also Spanakis 2020, 246: "Rhianus inserted archaic allusions to fragments of more recent historical periods and mixed the archaic notion of Thesprotia, which was derived from the Homeric tradition, with the more recent Epirus". On Rhianus's *Thessalika* as the primary source – and most likely also the source for entries where he is not explicitly cited – for the description of the communities of western Thessaly and the Pindus range in Stephanus of Byzantium's *Ethnika*, cf. Rönnlund 2023, 38, 42.

44 Cf., for instance, St. Byz. *Ethn*. κ-153: Κέλαιθοι· ἔθνος Θεσπρωτικὸν προσεχὲς τῇ Θετταλίᾳ. Ῥιανὸς δ΄. λέγονται καὶ Κελαιθεῖς.

in the Hellenistic period as a narrative of identity construction, emphasising the deep antiquity of the Prasaiboi and conveying their perceived distinctiveness with respect to other ethnic groups in the area. This arguably represents the underlying framework discernible behind Stephanus's entry, with the later inclusion of the colony of Bouthroton within the sphere of the Θεσπρωτοί, as reported by Ptolemy, emerging as a later manifestation of an earlier process of identity redefinition in the area formerly under the authority of the Prasaibian *koinon*.[45]

3 *Prasaiboi* from *ethnos* to *koinon*

The earliest attestation of the Prasaiboi as an *ethnos* appears in a manumission inscription dating to the period of the 'republican' *koinon* of the Epirotes, at a time when Bouthroton and a number of *ethne* orbiting around it belonged to the *koinon* of the Chaones. In this inscription, the prescript records a certain Saotas Prasaibos as priest of the local cult of Asklepios, listed in a subordinate position after the federal *strategos*, the Molossian Eualkos, and the *prostatas* of the Chaonian *koinon*, in an order reflecting the organisational levels of the Epirote *koinon* according to a customary epigraphic pattern.[46] This document confirms an earlier connection between the group of the Prasaiboi and the city of Bouthroton through the official role of Saotas. Beyond this, no further inference can be drawn from the inscription, except that the religious office here held by the Prasaiboi might indicate that they belonged to a group of 'amphictyonic *ethne*' traditionally aggregated around the local Asklepieion.

M. Melfi has emphasised the role played by this sanctuary both in the development of Bouthroton during the Hellenistic period and in its later establishment as the centre of the new political entity of the Prasaiboi, within a new regional system that functioned as an alternative to Phoinike.[47] The presence of a Πρασαιβός as priest of Asklepios prior to the formation of the *koinon* is noteworthy for

45 In this respect, it is worth confronting the testimony of Pausanias (5.22.2-4) concerning the region south of Apollonia in Illyria. Pausanias outlines the *donarium* of the Apolloniatai at Olympia, dedicated from the spoils of war at Thronion, and he then turns to the early population of Abantis – explicitly locating it within Thesprotia (cf. Zizza 2006, 224-8 no. 20). According to the tradition he reports, Abantis was originally inhabited by Lokrians from Thronion and Abantes from Euboea, who found themselves resettled there in the aftermath of the Trojan War.

46 *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 1, ll. 1-4: ἀγαθᾶι τύχαι· στραταγο[ῦ]ν[τος Ἀ]πειρωτᾶν | Εὐάλκου Μολοσσοῦ, προστα[τοῦντ]ος | δὲ Χαόνων Λυκίδα Ἐλιννοῦ, [ἱερέο]ς δὲ | Ἀσκλαπιοῦ Σαώτα Πρασαιβοῦ. See also above, fn. 14.

47 Melfi 2012, 23-30.

the reasons we recalled above, but it seems not sufficient *per se* to explain the subsequent prominence of the Prasaiboi in connection with the urban cult of Asklepios. Indeed, there are other inscriptions issued under the *koinon* of the Epirotes mentioning priests of Asklepios belonging to different *ethne* for which any connection or belonging to the Prasaiboi cannot be inferred. Specifically, we find a *hiereus* qualified by the ethnic Καρτωνός in the manumission record *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 6, and another by the ethnic Μυωνός in *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 7. An individual bearing the ethnic Myonos – whose name is lost – also appears as *prostatas* of the Chaones in other inscriptions from Bouthroton.[48] Further attestations of the Kartonoi, by contrast, belong to the period of the *koinon* of the Prasaiboi, through the presence of two individuals, father and son (Philippos and Nikadas), who held the offices of *strategos* of the Prasaiboi and priest of Asklepios.[49] These few data might suggest that, in the geopolitical reconfiguration of the area after Pydna, these two groups followed different trajectories: the first being represented at the leadership level of the Chaonian *koinon* but no longer attested thereafter, the second remaining well integrated within the new organisation of the Prasaiboi.

As far as the *ethnos* of the Prasaiboi is concerned, it is worth noting that their original connection with the sanctuary of Asklepios stands out as a significant element, perhaps to be understood as an important component of their identity that influenced their later transformation into a political entity. This connection, nonetheless, was not exclusive; for instance, we may still ask in what way the Prasaiboi differed from the Kartonoi, who were likewise associated with the sanctuary during the time of the Epirote *koinon* and had representatives holding leading positions in the subsequent *koinon* of the Prasaiboi. It could also be noted that, in comparison with the two sub-*ethne* just considered, the evolution of the Prasaiboi appears to follow a peculiar path. Although the plural Πρασαιβοί is regularly used in public documents to denote the new political entity – e.g. τὸ κοινὸν τῶν Πρασαιβῶν; ἔδοξε τᾶι βουλᾶι καὶ τᾶι ἐκκλησίαι τῶν Πρασαιβῶν – the ethnic Πρασαιβός never accompanies the names of the *koinon*'s officials, but occurs only in three manumission records, where it qualifies groups of witnesses and a group of manumissors consisting of three men and one woman.[50] As already noted, this

48 *I.Bouthrôtos* nos 2, 3, 4.

49 Philippos Kartonos, *strategos* of the Prasaiboi: *I.Bouthrôtos* nos 66-67; *hiereus* of Asklepios: *I.Bouthrôtos* nos 75-77 (without ethnic, patronymic τοῦ Νικάδα). Nikadas Kartonos: *hiereus* of Asklepios: *I.Bouthrôtos* nos 79-87; *martyr* (Νικάδας Φιλίππου Καρτωνός): *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 144 (manumission to Zeus Soter).

50 Witnesses: *I.Boutrôtos* nos 56 and 92; manumissors: *I.Boutrôtos* no. 60.

leaves open two possibilities. The first, and more straightforward, is that the ethnic Πρασαιβός is used here with the same meaning and scope as in the case of the *hiereus* Saotas; the second – appealing, yet difficult to ascertain – is that the designation Πρασαιβός applied to the individuals concerned indicated naturalised persons, granted a (otherwise unattested) Prasaibian *politeia* by the *koinon*.[51] In any case, the evidence concerning the roles played by the Prasaiboi in public inscriptions, both before and after the formation of their *koinon*, provides no clear justification for the eponymous status of this sub-*ethnos* within the new political entity.

A different perspective from which to explore the evolution of the Prasaiboi from a local sub-*ethnos* into a micro-regional political entity is offered by their association with the territory known as Πρασαιβία, attested in three proxeny decrees issued by the Prasaiboi: *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 8, in honour of an individual from Knossos and his descendants; *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 9, in honour of an individual from Teos, appointed as an additional *epistates* by a certain Antipatros for his abilities, and *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 10, where proxeny and other privileges are granted to a family group from Corcyra – husband, wife, and son. All three inscriptions confer the same set of honours and privileges, ensuring the integration of the recipients into the community of the Prasaiboi: in addition to recognising them as *proxenoi* and benefactors of the *koinon* – that is, as welcomed guests and friends, rather than diplomatic agents abroad – they grant *ateleia* (exemption from public burdens) and *enktesis* (the right to own property). In the cases of the Cretan and the Teian, the decrees also include *enteleia* (fiscal equality with citizens) and *asphaleia* (security in peace and war).[52] These decrees are not merely honorary; they grant concrete privileges facilitating the beneficiaries' mobility, settlement, and integration into the Prasaiboi community, particularly in terms of taxation and residence. This is particularly evident in the case of the Corcyraean family. The formula for granting *proxenia* is notably distinctive: Nikandros, *prostatas* of the Prasaiboi, addressed the *boule*

51 See above, Section 1.

52 *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 8, ll. 5-12: ἔδοξε τᾶι βουλᾶι καὶ τᾶι ἐ[κ]|κλησίαι τῶν Πρασαιβῶν εἶμεν πρόξενον Λασθένη Εὐνόμου | καὶ αὐτὸν καὶ ἐκγόνους, ὑπάρχειν τε αὐτῶι καὶ ἐκ<γό>νοις | καὶ γᾶς καὶ οἰκίας ἔγκτασιν ἐμ Πρασαιβίαι, καὶ ἀτέ|λειαν καὶ ἐντέλειαν καὶ ἀσφάλειαν καὶ αὐτοῖς καὶ | χρήμασιν, καὶ πολέμου καὶ εἰράνας, καὶ τὰ λοι[πὰ] | τίμια πάντα ὅσα καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις προξένοις καὶ | εὐεργέταις γέγραπται (It was resolved by the council and the assembly | of the Prasaiboi that Lasthenes son of Eunomos | shall be *proxenos*, both himself and his descendants, and that there shall belong to him and his descendants | both the right to acquire land and a house in Prasaibia, and exemption | from taxes and fiscal equality and security, both for themselves and | for their property, both in war and in peace, and all the other | honours as have been inscribed for the other *proxenoi* and | benefactors; Author's transl.). Cf. *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 9, ll. 10-17; no. 10, ll. 10-15.

and *ekklesia* of the Prasaiboi, proposing that *proxenia* be granted to Moschidas, his wife, and his son, with the approval of Lykiskos, son of Lykos, Oporrhonios.[53] The same individual is also attested as *strategos* of the Prasaiboi in another manumission record;[54] however, this office cannot be taken as implicitly indicated in the wording of the present decree, which – like other decrees issued by the political communities from these regions – reflects a somewhat personalistic and less formalised style of decision-making.[55] Therefore, it remains unclear whether Lykiskos' approval was connected to an institutional role or – more plausibly, in my view – whether he joined Nikandros in submitting the proposal to grant proxeny. Notably, both Lykiskos and Nikandros belonged to the same group of the Oporrhonioi, and were likely linked by personal ties to the honourees.[56]

Beyond this aspect – which nonetheless offers insights into the internal organisation of the Prasaiboi as a political community – there lies the question of Prasaibia itself: the territory within which the honoured individuals were granted *enktesis* for house and land. The three proxeny decrees cited are the only sources in the epigraphic corpus of Bouthroton that mention the toponym Prasaibia. No other epigraphic or literary source refers to it: it is neither associated with the ethnic name Prasaiboi in Stephanus of Byzantium or elsewhere, nor linked to the city of Bouthroton, otherwise well attested in literary tradition. Nevertheless, the indication ἐμ Πρασαιβίαι in these decrees is perfectly consistent. Broadly speaking, the emergence of this toponym appears to coincide with the existence and political agency of the Prasaiboi as a political union. The granting of *enktesis*, in particular, points to the exercise of territorial jurisdiction by the *koinon* over a land named after them. This formula closely resembles that found in the proxeny decree issued by the Epirote *koinon* in honour of Gaios Polphennios of Brundisium, who was granted the right

53 *I.Bouthrôtos* 10, ll. 4-9: ἀπολογιζομένου Νικά[νδρ]ου τοῦ [προ]στάτα | τῶν Πρασαιβῶν τᾶι β[ου]λᾶι καὶ τᾶι ἐ[κ]λησίαι τῶν | Πρασαιβῶν περὶ προξενίας Μοσχί[δαι] Ε[ὐ]νίσκου Κορκυ|ραίωι καὶ τᾶι γυναικὶ αὐτοῦ Λυσ̣ῖ κα[ὶ τῖι] ὑῖ̣ῖ Ἀρίστωνι καὶ | οἰομένου δεῖ[ν] δοθῆμεν αὐτο[ῖς] π[ροξενίαν] σ[υνεπ]αι[νή]|σαντος Λυκίσκου τοῦ Λύκου Ὀπορρ[ωνίο]υ, κτλ. (Nikandros son of [...], *prostatas* | of the Prasaiboi, having rendered an account to the council and the assembly of the | Prasaiboi concerning the grant of proxeny to Moschidas son of Euniskos, a Corcyraean, | and to his wife Lyso and to his son Ariston, and | being of the opinion that *proxenia* ought to be granted to them, with the co-approval of Lykiskos son of Lykos of the Oporrhonios, etc.; Author's transl.).

54 *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 132, where Lykiskos Oporrhonios is recorded in association with a different *prostatas*, Admatos son of Nikaios.

55 For a comparison in this respect, see the honorific decree issued by the South Illyrian *koinon* of the Balaieitai, discussed in Lasagni 2019, 68-74, and especially in Lasagni 2025, 294, with regard to the peculiar wording of the decree.

56 Nikandros is recorded as *prostatas* of the Prasaiboi, bearing the ethnic Oporrhonios, in *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 100 (and as *strategos* in *I.Bouthrôtos* nos 89, 114, 115, 151*bis*).

to acquire land and a house "in Epirus", that is, across the federal territory as a whole.[57] In parallel with this formulation – and with the semantic shift of Ἄπειρος from a designation used to refer to the opposite mainland as seen by the Ionian islanders, to that of a defined political entity[58] – Πρασαιβία should likewise be understood not as a mere geographical label, but as the name of the political territory governed by the Prasaiboi. As in the case of Ἄπειρος, it cannot be excluded that a region identified by the toponym Πρασαιβία may have pre-existed – albeit with a more limited geographical scope – prior to the establishment of the Hellenistic *koinon* as the *ethnos*-territory in which the Prasaiboi were settled. This may suggest that, regardless of the extent and precise location of an earlier Prasaibia, the formation of the Hellenistic *koinon* may have involved a toponymic redefinition of the region after the Prasaiboi – without necessarily implying, as is often the case elsewhere, a 'territorial expansion' beyond their original area of settlement or a leadership role for its members that can be clearly identified in the epigraphic record from Bouthroton.

Despite the caution required by the limited and often inconclusive nature of our sources – which prevent us from gaining a sufficiently clear picture of the formative stages of this political community, including the very date of the *koinon*'s establishment – it can nonetheless be seen as a potentially revealing aspect that a territory named Πρασαιβία emerges in the sources solely as an administrative, and apparently 'artificial', element: a toponym with no attested use in earlier periods and, more significantly, leaving no trace in later ones, following the dissolution of the *koinon* and the transformation of Bouthroton into a Roman colony (44 BC). Continuous changes in ethnic and 'federal' affiliations, alongside shifting territorial identities, represent a persistent dynamic in Epirote history. These processes emerge with particular turbulence within the fluid political and territorial landscape that followed the Third Macedonian War, marked by the disintegration of the Epirote federation and the rise of new local balances of power and autonomous political formations.[59] Such processes of territorial identity redefinition across this borderland region – at the intersection of Chaonian, Molossian, and Thesprotian territories – find a particularly significant illustration in the case of the 'Thesprotian' district of Καμμανία, which also bore

57 *I.Molossie* no. 81 (ca. 175-170 BC), ll. 12-13: γᾶς καὶ οἰκίας ἔγκτασιν ἐν Ἀπείροι.

58 Cf. Piccinini 2015, 173, with further references; on 'Epirus' as a political concept, cf. Raynor 2017, 246-7.

59 Cf. Cabanes 1986, 75-99, esp. 85 ff.

the name Κεστρινία, likely in connection with the Chaonian *koinon*'s claims over the area, as previously recalled.[60]

4 Framing the 'Thesprotian' Kammania as a Parallel Case

It is worth exploring more thoroughly the case of the Kammanoi, as it offers an additional perspective on the territorial dynamics of the region – before returning to the issue of the Prasaiboi in their evolution from local *ethnos* to the eponyms of a *koinon*. A population named the Kammanoi is mentioned in a fragment pertaining to the 31st book of Polybius's *Histories*. This group – previously located by modern scholars in various regions, from Sardinia to Asia Minor – was convincingly connected by Pierre Cabanes to the Epirote Kammanoi attested by Stephanus of Byzantium, thanks in particular to the connection provided by the manumission record *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 60, which provides decisive evidence for the presence of the Kammanoi at Bouthroton.[61] In relatively recent times, the publication of a bronze plaque inscription found in the *Small Temple* at Gitana has provided a further attestation of the ethnic Καμμανός outside Bouthroton.[62] In the text, a grandmother consecrates her grandson to Parthenos Themis ἐν Γιτάνοις. Whatever the motives behind this consecration may have been, the document is not primarily cultic in nature; rather, it served to formalise the act, as confirmed by the presence of *martyres* (ll. 6ff.) and by the mention of the local eponymous magistrate: ἐπὶ πρ(οστάτα) Λυσανία τοῦ Μενεφύλου Καμμανοῦ (ll. 1-2).

Returning to the passage of Polybius, the historian reports an intervention by Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus the Elder in 163 BC – during his second consulship – among the Kammanoi, whom he allegedly brought into submission to Rome "partly by force and partly by deception".[63] The identification of Polybius's Kammanoi as an Epirote population lends support to the hypothesis that Tiberius Gracchus

60 St. Byz. *Ethn*. κ-49 *s.v.* Καμμανία: μοῖρα Θεσπρωτίας. μετωνομάσθη δὲ Κεστρινία. ἐξ ἧς †Κάδμος† ὁ ποταμός. Κεστρίνη δὲ κτίσμα Κεστρίνου τοῦ υἱοῦ Ἑλένου τοῦ Πριαμίδου. οἱ οἰκήτορες Καμμανοί, ὡς τῆς Καμπανίας Καμπανοί (Kammania: a part of Thesprotia. It was renamed Kestrinia. From it flows the river †Kadmos†. Kestrine is a foundation of Kestrinos, son of Helenos son of Priamos. The inhabitants are called Kammanoi, as those of Kampania are called Kampanoi; Author's transl.).

61 Cabanes 1987, 49-56.

62 Photo published in Kanta-Kitsou 2008, 17; first epigraphic edition in Cabanes 2013, 309-15.

63 Polyb. 31.1, frg. 1: Ὅτι Τεβέριος τοὺς Καμμανοὺς τὰ μὲν βιασάμενος, τὰ δὲ παραλογισάμενος ὑπηκόους ἐποίησε Ῥωμαίοις (Tiberius made the Kammanoi subject to Rome, partly by force and partly by deception; Author's transl.).

the Elder was present in Greece in this year – an interpretation endorsed by Pierre Cabanes, who emphasises how coherently it aligns with the sequence of events narrated by the historian at that point. Cabanes attributes particular significance to this passage, seeing in it a well-defined historical context for the emergence of the *koinon* of the Prasaiboi. The despotic rule of the pro-Roman Charops the Younger – who as late as 170 BC still controlled Bouthroton through the *koinon* of the Epirotes based in Phoinike – appears to have provoked unrest among the local populations. The suppression of this uprising, possibly reflected in Polybius's report of Gracchus's intervention that ended with the subjugation of the Kammanoi, together with Rome's growing withdrawal of support for Charops, may have laid the groundwork for the establishment of the new political union of the Prasaiboi under Roman aegis.

As noticed above, the inscriptions from Bouthroton attest to the coexistence of both the ethnic Καμμανός (in the compound form Καμμανὸς Βουθρώτιος) and Κεστρ(ε)ῖνος. The impression, therefore, is that the change of place name to which Stephanus refers in the lemma Καμμανία may have been not the simple substitution of an original toponym with a new one, but maybe the expanded attribution to a larger territory – including also the region previously indicated as Kammania – of the attribution to the Chaonian Kestrine.

If one considers Polybius's account of Tiberius Gracchus's intervention, one may wonder about the real weight of this operation in the broader context of Epirus's instability under Charops – and the actual relevance of the 'Kammanoi' in it. The mention of the event in Polybius, and the (at least chronologically) subsequent emergence of a new political entity in the region, would seem to suggest that the subjugation of the Kammanoi by Roman authority was a strategically significant operation – one implying that the Kammanoi were not a negligible element, but rather a source of unrest substantial enough to warrant direct intervention. Despite the fact that the epigraphic evidence for the Kammanoi in the region is limited to only two occurrences – the Καμμανοὶ Βουθρώτιοι at Bouthroton and the *prostatas* Καμμανός at Gitana – these testimonies might be taken to hint at a picture consistent with the observations made above. When the Kammanoi do appear in the documentation, they surface only in a late context, after the reshaping of the area under Roman control, and they appear in two instances that may reflect an internal split: at Bouthroton, where the Καμμανοὶ Βουθρωτιοί are attested as a group established within the Prasaiboi *koinon*, and at Gitana, where a Kammanos held a leading public office – quite plausibly within the Thesprotian *koinon*, in the broader framework of the reconstituted Epirote *koinon*.[64]

64 Cf. Cabanes 2013, 310-11.

Despite their scant epigraphic attestations, a certain relevance of the Kammanoi may nonetheless be suggested by echoes of possible Kammanian genealogical narratives in literary sources – traditions in which their legacy appears to surface in the association of the toponym 'Campania' with Epirus and Chaonia, hinting at a contested space shared with Chaonia and Kestrinia. These traditions can be seen as a product of territorial identity claims within an internally fluid border zone. As for the association between Kammania and Kampania, we may note in this respect, first of all, that the entry Καμμανία in Stephanus of Byzantium also refers to the pair Καμπανία-Καμπανοί, recalling a connection whose inclusion may not be due solely to orthographic similarity. A set of traditions concerning the toponym 'Campania' as an ancient name for Epirus, and its renaming as 'Chaonia' in honour of the Trojan hero Chaon, is preserved in two *scholia* by Servius on verses 334 and 335 of Book III of Vergil's *Aeneid*, within the well-known episode of Aeneas's landing at Bouthroton.[65] These references are particularly intriguing when considered alongside the enigmatic appearance of the Kammanoi in the sources previously discussed, as well as the lemma of Stephanus of Byzantium describing the renaming of Kammania as Kestrinia. Servius writes: "*Chaonios cognomine campos*: That Epirus has no 'plains' is evident to all; however, it is said that once there was a king named *Campus*, whose descendants were called the *Campylidae*, and that Epirus was known as 'Campania', as reported by Alexarchus, a Greek historian, and Aristonicus. Varro mentions a daughter of *Campus* named *Campa*, from whom the region is said to have taken its name. Later on, as has been said, the region was renamed *Chaonia* by Helenus, who had killed his brother *Chaon* – or, as others say, his companion – while hunting. Others say that *Cestria*, the daughter of *Campus*, was taken as wife by Helenus, who named the *Campi* after his father-in-law and the *Chaones* after *Chaon*".[66]

Servius preserves a composite body of traditions concerning the renaming of the Epirus/mainland from an original name *Campania*,

65 Cf. Verg. *Aen*. 3.333-336: *Morte Neoptolemi regnorum reddita cessit | pars Heleno, qui Chaonios cognomine campos | Chaoniamque omnem Troiano a Chaone dixit, | Pergamaque Iliacamque iugis hanc addidit arcem*. (By the death of Neoptolemus a portion of the realm passed as his due to Helenus, who called the plains Chaonian and the whole land Chaonia from Chaon of Troy, and placed on the heights a Pergamus, this Ilian citadel; transl. H. Rushton Fairclough, *Loeb Classical Library* 1916).

66 Autor's transl. Serv. *Aen*. 3.334: *Epirum campos non habere omnibus notum est, sed constat ibi olim regem nomine Campum fuisse eiusque posteros Campylidas dictos et Epirum Campaniam vocatam, sicut Alexarchus, historicus Graecus, et Aristonicus referunt. Varro filiam Campi Campam dictam, unde provinciae nomen; post vero, sicut dictum est, Chaoniam ab Heleno appellatam, qui fratrem suum Chaonem, vel ut alii dicunt comitem, dum venaretur occiderat. alii filiam Campi Cestriam ab Heleno ductam uxorem, et <eum> de nomine soceri Campos, de nomine Chaone Chaonas dixisse*.

after the eponymous king *Campus* and his daughter *Campa*, to *Chaonia*, a toponym bestowed by Helenus in honour of the Trojan hero *Chaon*. Of particular interest, as the possible echo of a mythological aetiology of a territorial redefinition and merging under Chaonian hegemony, is the alternative tradition that names *Cestria* (eponym of Kestrinia) as the daughter of *Campus*, in place of *Campa* (eponym of *Campania*). *Cestria* is said to have been taken as wife by Helenus, who is also portrayed as the agent of an *ethnos*-making operation – one stemming from their union and expressed in the dual naming of the *Chaones* and the *Campi*, after Helenus's brother, the Trojan hero *Chaon*, and his father-in-law *Campus*, respectively. This act of naming, understood as a constitutive act of *ethnos* and spatial identity formation, is further underlined by Servius in his commentary on *Aeneid* 3.335, where he explains that the verb *dixit* (cf. Verg. *Aen*. 3.334-335: [*scil*. Helenus] *Chaonios cognomine campos | Chaoniamque omnem Troiano a Chaone dixit*) must be understood as precisely denoting the imposition of a name upon a place or a people: *ut "fluvium cognomine Thybrim diximus" et "Italiam dixisse ducis de nomine gentem"*.

Although the available evidence is difficult to integrate into a coherent reconstruction, it seems reasonable to suggest that a single 'dossier' on the Kammanoi/Kampanoi – and on their dialectical relationship with Kestrine and Chaonia – may be constructed by bringing together the late testimonies of Servius and Stephanus of Byzantium with the late Hellenistic evidence from Polybius and the epigraphic corpus of Bouthroton. In the latter, we find attestations not only of individuals bearing the ethnic designation Kammanoi Bouthrotioi, but also of the ethnic Kammeos, which is not attested outside the *koinon* of the Prasaiboi and may represent a variant or a subgroup derived from the same identity matrix as the Kammanoi.[67]

What seems to emerge from this ensemble is the existence of aetiological myths concerning the ethnic and territorial identity of the Kammanoi, circulating at least in the late Hellenistic period.[68] These

67 Καμμηός: *I.Bouthrotos* no. 90 (*martyr*); feminine Καμμηίς: *I.Bouthrôtos* nos 118-119, with Lhôte 2013, 54 (manumittress). According to Lhôte 2013, 53-4, the two groups – the Kammanoi and the Kammeis – would both be connected to a heroic name *Καμμεύς and interpreted, respectively, as "la tribu de Kammeus, le héros qui ne ménage pas sa peine au combat" and "les descendants de Kammeus, celui qui ne ménage pas sa peine au combat". For the reasons outlined above concerning the interpretation of the Kammanoi Bouthrotioi, although I obviously accept that Kammanoi and Kammeis represent two distinct groupings, I do not fully agree with the rigid taxonomic distinction that Lhôte (following Fraser) adopts when defining the difference between them ("les témoins de l'affranchissement sont Πρασαιβοὶ (ethnique), Καμμανοὶ (phylétique), Βουθρώτιοι (clanique ou microethnique ou nom de famille) […] Καμμανοί est à proprement parler un phylétique, qui se présente dans l'inscription avec le clanique Βουθρώτιοι, tandis que Καμμηός/Καμμηίς n'est qu'un clanique").

68 The traditions reported by Servius concerning a king Campus and the original designation of Epirus as Campania are, unfortunately, difficult to date and contextualize.

myths may have played a role in the claims made by the Kammanoi with whom Tiberius Gracchus came into contact – namely, a group of insurgents seeking autonomy from Phoinike and from Charops, and likely doing so by invoking the great antiquity of their territorial identity and a form of opposition to the government of Phoinike. It is therefore not surprising, especially in light of what has already been observed, to find the Kammanoi listed among the 'Thesprotian' tribes in Stephanus of Byzantium.

In both the episode recorded by Polybius and the epigraphic evidence from Bouthroton and Gitana, the declaration of affiliation with the 'Kammanoi' should not necessarily be understood as a neutral piece of information (that is, as a simple statement of membership in a contemporaneously existing community) but might instead have been connected, at least to some extent, with claims shaped by identity myths. This may offer a plausible explanation for the appearance of the double ethnic designation Kammanoi Bouthrotioi in *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 60. Cabanes' statement that the Bouthrotioi may have constituted a subgroup of the larger Kammanoi appears to me overly mechanical.[69] Given the complex circumstances surrounding the formation of the *koinon* of the Prasaiboi, it may instead be more appropriate to think of a group that, alongside their formal affiliation with the residential community of Bouthroton in the framework of the Prasaibian *koinon*, asserted their ethnic identity as 'Kammanoi' – that is, as the most ancient inhabitants of this part of Epirus prior to its 'transformation' into Chaonia.

Many of the details escape us, but the scattered tesserae assembled here seem to coalesce into a coherent picture – one that may also shed light on the dynamics of identity formation that involved the Prasaiboi themselves. Therefore, it is worth returning briefly to the land designated as Prasaibia, in light of the preceding discussion on the Kammanoi. The most straightforward interpretation remains that Prasaibia denoted the entire territory under the authority of the *koinon* of the Prasaiboi, functioning as a broad institutional label encompassing their political domain as a whole. Given the lack of data about the internal territorial organisation of the Prasaiboi, and in light of the comparison with the formulas employed in other second-century BC proxeny decrees from Epirus, there is no basis

In addition to citing unnamed sources (*sicut dictum est…*, *ut alii dicunt…*), Servius refers to a lost work by Varro, whose scholarly activity provides the only secure *terminus ante quem* for the circulation of such myths. He also mentions a Greek historian named Alexarchus, plausibly to be identified with the author of an *Italika* in four books (*FGrH* 829), and an equally obscure figure named Aristonicus, likely to correspond to the mythographer Aristonicus of Tarentum (*FGrH* 57); both these Greek authors are difficult to date and are known solely through extremely scanty *testimonia*.

69 Cf. the commentary to *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 60.

for an alternative hypothesis suggesting that Prasaibia referred to a specific district within the *koinon*, within which the right of *enktesis* may have been exercised by the honoured individuals. Nonetheless, while the available sources only allow us to interpret Prasaibia in the frame of the Prasaibian *koinon* as referring to its jurisdiction, its use may nonetheless carry deeper connotations, echoing earlier identity narratives or territorial claims embedded in the name itself. In parallel with what has been observed in the case of the Kammanoi – also described by Stephanus of Byzantium as a Thesprotian *ethnos*, like the Prasaiboi – it may be hypothesised that the emergence of the Prasaiboi as a political subject in the region was accompanied by similar processes of territorial reassertion and identity reconstruction. These processes may have been articulated through territorial claims grounded in aetiological narratives that emphasised the Prasaiboi's distinctiveness from the Chaonian sphere, within which they had been previously incorporated.

It is worth drawing attention to the manumission record *I.Bouthrôtos* no. 60, which – albeit an isolated and certainly elusive piece of evidence – may prove relevant to the issues discussed here. This inscription is particularly notable for bringing together, within a single document, both one of the rare attestations of the *Prasaiboi* as a local *ethnos* – used here to designate the group of manumissors – and the only instance of the ethnic Καμμανός in the epigraphic corpus of Bouthroton, identifying the group of *martyres* (ll. 5-7). The latter is distinguished by a twofold peculiarity: the use of the compound ethnic form Καμμανοί Βουθρώτιοι, and the unique specification πάντες, which may have served to emphasise that this (unusual?) dual affiliation applied equally to all individuals listed as witnesses. The presence of these two distinct ethnic labels suggests that the formulation adopted in this document – rather than merely reflecting minor or localised identities of the individuals involved, as is typically the case – was intended to articulate major group affiliations, likely corresponding to the fundamental constituencies involved in the formation of the *koinon* of the Prasaiboi. These designations may thus display the outcome of a politically negotiated process of integration involving multiple territorial and ethnic identities.

Yet the question remains as to why the Prasaiboi assumed such a central role in this historical context, becoming the eponymous group of the new *koinon*.

5 'Perrhaibian' Prasaiboi?

Given the irregularity with which ethnic adjectives appear in inscriptions from Bouthroton – and the frequent occurrence of obscure ethnic names in private manumissions – it is difficult to assess the

actual 'size' or demographic weight of the Prasaiboi. It cannot be ruled out that their *ethnos* may have encompassed some of the numerous lesser-known groups attested epigraphically. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the Prasaiboi constituted the largest or most comprehensive *ethnos*, aggregating a wide range of tribal clans. What can be stated with confidence is that the Prasaiboi were already present prior to the formation of the *koinon* that bore their name, as one among a small number of sub-*ethne* associated with the Asklepieion of Bouthroton – attested, in particular, by the mention of a *hiereus* Prasaibos in the frame of the Chaonian *koinon*.[70]

In attempting to fill the gaps left by the sources, the formation of the *koinon* of the Prasaiboi under Roman aegis has been interpreted as part of an ideological and cultural operation especially related to the distinct identity of the Prasaiboi. I refer in particular to the analysis proposed by M. Melfi (already recalled above) which focuses on the role of the Asklepieion of Bouthroton in redefining the city as a regional centre and focal point of the new political entity of the Prasaiboi. This interpretation builds on the association between the Epirote Prasaiboi and the 'western' Perrhaiboi (known from Homer and later sources),[71] as well as with the Perrhaiboi more broadly, proposing a parallel

70 See above, Section 3.

71 Hom. *Il*. 2.748-752: Γουνεὺς δ' ἐκ Κύφου ἦγε δύω καὶ εἴκοσι νῆας· | τῷ δ' Ἐνιῆνες ἔποντο μενεπτόλεμοί τε Περαιβοὶ | οἵ περὶ Δωδώνην δυσχείμερον οἰκί' ἔθεντο, | οἵ τ' ἀμφ' ἱμερτὸν Τιταρησσὸν ἔργα νέμοντο | ὅς ῥ' ἐς Πηνειὸν προΐει καλλίρροον ὕδωρ (the 'warlike Perhaiboi' – led by Guneus together with the Aenianes – are depicted in these verses as divided into two groups dwelling on opposite slopes of the Pindus range: one settled in the harsher region around wintry Dodona, the other cultivating the lands along the 'desirable' Titaresios, a tributary of the Peneios river flowing from the slopes of Mount Olympus); cf. Strab. 9.5.20; Tzetz. *Ad Lycophr*. 906 (Γόνος, ἡ λεγομένη Γονοῦσα, ἐστὶ καὶ πόλις Περραιβίας. Οἱ δὲ Περραιβοὶ, ἔθνος Ἠπειρωτικόν). Cf. also Aesch. *Suppl*. 254-258 (the reign of Pelasgus includes "the land of the Perrhaiboi and the regions beyond the Pindus, by the Paeonians and the mounts of Dodona", cf. Hom. *Il*. 16.233: Zeus 'Dodonaean, Pelasgian' ruling over the wintry Dodona); Plin. *HN* 4.2: *Epiros in universum appellata a Cerauniis incipit montibus. In ea primi Chaones, a quibus Chaonia, dein Thesproti, Antigonenses, locus Aornos et pestifera avibus exhalatio, Cestrini, Perrhaebi, quorum mons Pindus* (Epirus, called by this name as a whole, begins at the Ceraunian mountains; in it, first come the Chaonians, from whom Chaonia takes its name, then the Thesprotians, the Antigoneis, the place named Aornon with exhalations noxious to birds, the Kestrinoi, the Perrhaiboi, whose mountain is Pindus; Author's transl.). 'Western Perrhaiboi' dwelling in the region of Mount Lakmos, along the upper course of the Acheloos (Inachos), are also attested in Soph., frg. 271 Radt; cf. Cassio 1994, 105; Fantasia 2017, 36-7 and esp. fn. 100.

between the formation of the *koinon* of the Perrhaiboi[72] – also under Roman sponsorship – and that of the Prasaiboi.[73]

The connection between the Prasaiboi and the Perrhaiboi had already been suggested by James H. Oliver and Nicholas Hammond, through a line of reasoning based essentially on linguistic arguments. In 1947, James H. Oliver,[74] in a review of Luigi Maria Ugolini's book *L'Acropoli di Butrinto* (1942), first proposed identifying the Prasaiboi with the 'western' Perrhaiboi, located west of the Pindus range according to Strabo and Pliny;[75] with the Perrhaiboi listed among the Illyrian *ethne* – alongside the Taulantioi, Encheleis, and others – by Appian;[76] and, finally, with the Homeric Περαιβοί belonging to Guneus' contingent, partly dwelling "around the wintry Dodona".[77] Oliver's linguistic explanation for a possible connection between the Prasaiboi and the Perrhaiboi remains somewhat tenuous. Just as the Corinthian-derived month name Κάρνειος appears in Prasaiboi inscriptions in the metathesised form Κράνειος, Oliver suggests that a similar phonetic shift may have affected the ethnonym as well. A hypothetical original form Παρσαιβοί could have yielded both the attested Παρσαιβοί, through metathesis, and Περραιβοί, through vocalic modification (*e*-vocalism) combined with consonantal

72 The Thessalian Perrhaiboi, formerly part of the Macedonian domains since the time of Philip II, formed an autonomous political entity under the Roman aegis after Flamininus's declaration of freedom for Greeks in 196 BC (Polyb. 18.46.5, 47.6), cf. Graninger 2011, 33; their organisation as a 'federal' community (*koinon*) is scarcely known, based exclusively on inscriptions; the supreme magistrate of the Perrhaiboi, the *strategos*, is recorded, in each case, in association with the locally serving priest of Asklepios (i.e. decree of Gonnoi: Helly *Gonnoi* II, no. 40; decree of Olosson: *SEG* 29.544), who held eponymous functions, as in many other cases in *poleis* of the Macedonian sphere, cf. Melfi 2007, 239.

73 Melfi 2012, 23-30.

74 Oliver 1947, 103.

75 Strab. 9.5.12: the Perrhaiboi are described by Strabo as 'migrant men' (μετανάσται ἄνθρωποι) who settled on the western slopes of Mount Pindus, after arriving from elsewhere, cf. Strab. 9.5.19.

76 App. *Ill.* 1.2 (a hero Perrhaibos is here listed among the sons of Illyros, as the eponymous ancestor of the Perrhaiboi *ethnos*).

77 See above, fn. 71. The question of Guneus' contingent is actually highly puzzling and has been the subject of much scholarly discussion, nourished by a broader ancient tradition connecting Thessaly to the shrine of Dodona: St. Byz. *Ethn.* δ-146 *s.v.* Δωδώνη, cf. Piccinini 2017, 111-22; Aston 2024, 336-41. Even if one interprets the Homeric mention of the regions "around Dodona" and "along the Titaresios" as referring not jointly to the Perrhaebians but respectively to the Ainianes (Dodona) and the Perrhaiboi (Titaresios), the peculiar composition of the contingent led by Guneus remains – geographically split across the two sides of the Pindus range, an anomaly that could be 'historically' explained by considering the seasonal mobility and transhumant character of the mountain populations in the area, whose territorial cohesion could have been sustained through transit routes through the Pindus range (cf. Chapinal-Heras 2021, 141-2), which connected inland Epirus with upper Thessaly: cf. Aston 2024, 336-7, with references.

assimilation. However, this derivation does not adequately account for the Homeric form Περαιβοί.

On the other hand, Hammond highlighted the shared component -αιβοι in the names Prasaiboi and Perrhaiboi, tracing it back to the river Aoos by way of the alternative hydronym Αἴας, attested in Hecataeus.[78] Perrhaiboi and Prasaiboi might thus be interpreted as variants for populations located 'beyond the Aoos'.[79] This observation appears undoubtedly more appealing than the previous one. Beyond the shared termination – which appears to be exceptional and unproductive, likely connected to archaic substratal elements – and the hypothesis of a topographic link to the river Aoos, the two names clearly convey a common descriptive notion of 'transit, passage', and position 'beyond, across'. They both reflect the shared root **per-*, which underlies the epic verb πράσσω, in the sense of 'to pass through, to travel', as well as the adverb πέρα, 'beyond, across'.[80]

A very different explanatory hypothesis is offered by Lhôte, who interprets Πρασαιβοί and Περραιβοί as two distinct evolutions of an originally identical ethnonym, both ultimately meaning "the killers of cattle, that is, those who perform hecatombs".[81] Starting from the verb πέρθω ('to destroy, kill'), as in Athena περσε-πόλις, and the element βοϝ- ('cattle'), he reconstructs an early compound *Περσεβοί ('cattle-slayers'). A diminutive form *Περσαῖοι (comparable to the heroic name Περσεύς) may have coexisted with *Περσεβοί, and their convergence would have yielded a new compound *Περσαι-βοῖ; through the regular intervocalic assimilation *-rs-* → *-rr-*, this would account for the Thessalian Περραιβοί. The Epirote Πρασαιβοί, in turn, would reflect a secondary development produced by the contamination of the sigmatic aorist ἔπερσα with the thematic aorist ἔπραθον, yielding a form *ἔπρασα, from which variants such as *Πρασεβοί and *Πρασαῖοι could arise; their combination would explain the attested ethnonym Πρασαιβοί.

These explanations, however, are not entirely satisfactory, insofar as they do not in themselves clarify the nature of any possible relationship between the historical Prasaiboi and the Perrhaiboi. While linguistic reconstruction can suggest a formal connection between the two ethnonyms, such proposals offer limited guidance when one turns to historical traditions and to the evidence concerning the Prasaiboi as they appear in our sources. It is worth underscoring that the ancient evidence contains no explicit reference to a link between the two groups – a silence that, although it cannot be

78 Hecat. *FGrH* 1A F 102a-c.

79 Hammond 1967, 373-4, 703.

80 Cf. Beekes 2010, ss.vv. πράσσω (1229-30), πέρα (1175).

81 Lhôte 2013, 91-2.

taken as proof in either direction, remains noteworthy in light of the well-attested patterns of interaction and population movements between the Thessalian and Epirote sides of the Pindus range. The Prasaiboi – whose identity can scarcely have been confined to a purely local memory, given their role as the eponymous group of the Hellenistic *koinon* of Bouthroton – are known in the sources merely as 'Thesprotian' *ethnos*. Were any traditional connection with the prominent Perrhaiboi known or culturally meaningful, it might be expected to leave at least some trace in the surviving evidence.

For the moment, therefore, without dismissing the linguistic possibilities outlined by Lhôte, it seems to me that Hammond's hypothesis remains the more promising avenue of interpretation. If one follows his approach, two points may tentatively be retained: first, that the ethnonym Πρασαιβοί may preserve traces of an ancient toponymic substratum; and second, that it conveys a notion of spatial positioning or movement 'beyond' a reference point. Yet this 'beyond' need not imply any direct connection with the human geography of the Pindus or with the Perrhaiboi. Rather, as seems more plausible to me, this notion of being 'beyond' may have originated within the area around Bouthroton itself – specifically, in the territory that would later come under the authority of the Prasaiboi and form part of their Hellenistic *koinon* – in reference to populations who were somehow located 'beyond' something, whether this meant being part of Corcyra's *perea*, or situated 'beyond' Bouthroton across the Vivar channel, or referring to transhumant groups living beyond the course of the Pavllë river or the passes of Mount Mile.[82] No firm conclusion can be drawn.

The observations and critical remarks expressed above can also be extended to the enigmatic 'sons of the Pyraiboi' mentioned in the well-known and much-discussed elegy from the *polyandrion* of Ambracia (*SEG* 41.540a).[83] The linguistic plausibility of identifying the Πυραιβοί with a group of 'western Perrhaiboi' – specifically with the Homeric μενεπτόλεμοι Περαιβοί – has been demonstrated by Cassio.[84] This explanation, however, does not help us move towards a historical reconstruction of the event – namely, the massacre of a Corinthian-Ambraciote delegation ambushed by an Epirote population during its journey – nor does it help to connect it to the known human geography of the region. The hypothesis – once more widely accepted in scholarship – of an ambush along the road between the coastal landing

82 On the *chora* of Bouthroton in the Pavllë river valley and its development, cf. Hernandez, Hodges 2020, 292-309.

83 For updated references to editions and bibliography, cf. Gonfloni, *CEGS* no. 142a (https://ceg-supplementum.uniroma2.it/ceg-142a-epigramma-funerario-per-i-caduti-di-ambracia/).

84 Cassio 1994, 105.

point of Ambrakos and Ambracia is now less compelling. Likewise, as Fantasia rightly points out, while the transhumant nature of the Pindus populations certainly provides a valid framework for understanding the phenomenon of the western Perrhaiboi,[85] it does not in itself suffice to explain a raid by such a population deep into the region of Ambracia. A more convincing alternative hypothesis, put forward by Fantasia, is that the attack may have taken place much farther north, in a region outside Ambracia's control, along inland routes taken by the delegation as it travelled from the Arachthos valley towards the Corinthian colony of Apollonia, by way of the Aoos and the Drinos valley.[86] Fantasia's reconstruction has the merit of placing the episode and its actors within a more plausible geographical framework.[87] However, it emphasises less a crucial aspect of the issue – namely, the possibility that the reference to the 'sons of the Pyraiboi' in the *polyandrion* is best understood as a poetic projection on the part of the Corinthian side. Rather than pointing to a historically defined and unambiguously identifiable population, the name may have functioned as a symbolically charged and generalised ethnic label, chosen for its cultural resonance in evoking Epirote groups whose contours were likely vague and who, as previously noted, were associated with lands perceived as lying 'beyond'.

In a recent commentary on the *polyandrion* inscription, Ephraim Lytle observes that "the otherwise enigmatic 'sons of the Pyraiboi' does not denote real, pastoral Pyraiboi, but is rather a carefully chosen and highly poetic allusion".[88] Lytle locates the massacre of the Ambraciote-Corinthian delegation along the road to Dodona, thus interpreting the poetic reference to the 'sons of the Pyraiboi' as an evocation of a mythical geography of Homeric resonance – one capable of suggesting the placement of an undefined Epirote group responsible for the attack within the sacred territory surrounding the sanctuary. His interpretation is, in my view, more convincing, as it avoids relying on any presumed connection with the 'historical'

85 So, Randone 2013, 33-52, esp. 39-41 (maintaining that the ambush took place in the territory of Ambracia).

86 Fantasia 2017, 32-9, esp. 38-9, where he recalls that the existence of an inland route connecting Corinth and Apollonia, sheltered from potential attacks by Corcyra, is further supported by the information provided in Thuc. 1.26.2 and by the Apolloniatai's *donarium* at Olympia (*I.Apollonia Illyrie* T 303; cf. Paus. 5.22.2-4).

87 Cf. Fantasia 2017, 39: "The idea that, at a date to be placed in the second half of the sixth century, a joint mission of Corinthians and Ambraciots heading for Apollonia was attacked by the Perrhaebians while travelling along the inland road along the Pindus, and that the fallen were commemorated in an imposing memorial at Ambracia, is more plausible than the reconstruction hitherto taken for granted, which leaves unexplained the mention of an *ethnos* whose historically attested territory lies at some distance from Ambracia to the north" (Author's transl.).

88 Lytle 2022, 77-95 (quotation on page 87).

Perrhaiboi and instead offers a more fitting 'colonial' perspective on the identity of the "sons of the Pyraiboi". One can notice how the interpretive framework that emerges here shows strong affinities with the case of the Prasaiboi, who can be considered a deeply archaic *ethnos*, whose identity may have been shaped through an external perspective, as a population belonging to a space 'beyond'. Crucially, none of this requires forcing the sources to establish any historical or territorial connection between the Πρασαιβοί and the Πυραιβοί, Περαιβοί or Περραιβοί.

In light of the foregoing considerations, Melfi's hypothesis of a connection between the formation of the *koinon* of the Prasaiboi of Bouthroton and that of the Thessalian Perrhaiboi – established a generation earlier, after 196 BC – appears quite difficult to substantiate.[89] The idea that both of these political entities, created under Roman auspices, were similarly characterised by having placed themselves under the protection of Asklepios as part of a cultural policy engineered by Rome proves problematic when examined against the epigraphic evidence, which suggests that the two contexts are far less comparable than the hypothesis implies. In particular, the presence of a priest of Asklepios as the eponymous official of the Perrhaebian *koinon* is best explained as an application of an institutional model of Macedonian origin.[90] By contrast, the documents produced by the Prasaiboi make it clear that the priest of Asklepios did not constitute a structural element of their civic institutions, but rather represented an 'adjunct eponymy' tied to the local sanctuary. A series of manumission records from the Tower of the Inscriptions attests, alongside the priest of Asklepios, the alternating presence of a priest of Zeus Soter, suggesting that the mention of such priesthoods was linked to their respective sanctuary contexts – particularly those involving the consecration of manumitted slaves – rather than to the internal political organisation of the *koinon*. Finally, the absence of any priest in the prescripts of the public decrees issued by the *koinon* further confirms that this political formation was never placed under the institutional authority or symbolic patronage of Asklepios.[91] Beyond this, the idea that the political formation of the Prasaiboi in Epirus consciously drew on a Thessalian identity framework – emphasising their association with Asklepios and foregrounding their ethnic identity in deliberate

89 Melfi 2012, 23-30, esp. 25-6.

90 The priest of Asklepios as an eponymous official is frequently attested elsewhere in Thessaly, outside Gonnoi (e.g. *AEph* 1916, 272 no. 18: Phalanna, early third century BC), thus following an institution widely attested in Macedonian cities – see in particular Amphipolis, Kalindoia, Pella, Beroia, Antigoneia, and others – as a result of the reforms of Philip II (Hatzopoulos 1996, 153-6, 384).

91 Cf. the proxeny decrees *I.Bouthrôtos* nos 8, 9, 10 (see above, fns 52-3).

reference to a Perrhaebian model – remains unconvincing. While Melfi's interpretation is undoubtedly much more nuanced and well-substantiated than these brief remarks may suggest, the broader argument nonetheless rests on a fragile premise: the assumed identification of the Prasaiboi with the Perrhaiboi, whether of Thessalian or Epirote tradition. Had such a reference carried genuine ideological or symbolic weight, we would expect it to have left more explicit traces in our sources. It is worth stressing, moreover, that the Prasaiboi already appear rooted in the area around the sanctuary of Asklepios prior to the foundation of their eponymous *koinon*. From this perspective, it becomes increasingly difficult to see how such a deeply localised configuration could have drawn institutional or conceptual inspiration from a distant Thessalian model, even under Roman influence.

6 Ancient Prasaiboi in the New Epirus

Therefore, we are best advised to return to the only ancient source that explicitly mentions the Prasaiboi – brief though it may be. The definition of them as a Thesprotian *ethnos* transmitted by Stephanus of Byzantium at least allows us to situate their role in the newly reconstituted, pro-Roman Epirus (following the devastation wrought by Aemilius Paullus) in continuity with the ancient and original Epirus inhabited by the 'Homeric' Thesprotoi. The 'Thesproticity' of the Prasaiboi may have been ideologically valorised precisely as a contrast to the pro-Macedonian Molossians and to the *koinon* of the Epirotes based at Phoinike, emerging from the dissolution of the Epirote federation and led by the ruthless Charops the Younger. The mechanisms through which the *ethnos* of the Prasaiboi achieved the prominence necessary for the emergence of a koinon cannot yet be fully charted on the basis of the surviving evidence, but several factors may be cautiously considered. Personal ties between local elites and Roman authorities may have played a role, as may the strategic or symbolic importance of specific territories – yet the details remain elusive. Ultimately, if we are to grasp the political and cultural meaning of the Prasaiboi as a construct, our most reliable point of departure remains the terse but revealing note in Stephanus of Byzantium. That single line may well preserve a local discursive elaboration of the *koinon* of the Prasaiboi – an identity framed as Thesprotian, and thereby conceived as a bridge between the Epirus of tradition and the new Epirus reshaped by Roman intervention.

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