CHAPTER 1

Geography and Landscape
(Plates I–V, VII–X)

1 Overview of the Pharsalian Territory

Greece is changing fast and the most up-to-the-minute account of it is, in some measure, out of date by the time it appears.

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The cave site examined in this study is located in southeastern Thessaly, on one of the rocky ridges which bound the southern border of the Pharsalian plain. Today this area falls within the borders of the Larissa peripheral unit, in the municipality of modern day Pharsala. In antiquity it belonged to the χώρα or territory of Pharsalus, the main city in the tetrad of Phthiotis. Situated on a spur of the lower Narthacium range—approximately in the same spot where Pharsala stands today—ancient Pharsalus controlled the middle basin of the Enipeus river and the mountainland to the north and south of it. This rugged landscape of mountains and low hills unfolding at the edges of a river valley formed the natural background in which the Karapla sanctuary was established. It therefore seems reasonable, before undertaking a detailed examination of the cave and its immediate surroundings, to begin with a general discussion of the Pharsalian region and its main morphological features, both as they appear to us now (1.1, pp. 4–8) and as they may have appeared in those distant times when the Karapla cult was alive (1.1, pp. 8–11). A section specifically dedicated to the district where the cave lies will conclude the chapter (1.2).

At present the Pharsala municipality extends over an area of ca. 740 km², incorporating the formerly independent municipalities of Enipeas in the west, Polydamantas in the east, and Narthaki in the south. The territory of ancient Pharsalus is estimated to have been far smaller, ranging between 100 and 200 km². Its boundaries can be determined to a reasonable degree of approximation. In the west it was delimited by the adjoining territory of Euhydrium, probably along a line running somewhere in between this site and the road to Larissa. In the east it bordered the territory of Eretria where the Enipeus river enters the plain. In the north it shared with Scotussa the lower slope of the Revenia hills. In the south, where it was bounded by the Achaean domains of Peuma and Proerna, it extended up to the foot of the Narthacium range, encompassing the highlands west of the upper Enipeus valley.

Geologically the region described above shows the characteristic profile of the Sub-Pelagonian zone, with deep-water limestones and other marine sedimentary rocks resting on an ophiolitic substructure. Recent deposits of Holocene alluvium and Pliocene fluvi-terrestrial sediment respectively fill the Pharsalian basin and form most of the lower elevations along its perimeter, including the elongated hill chain that bounds the northern part of the area, the Revenia or Mid Thessalian Ridge. In the south, Upper Cretaceous limestones with underlying layers of shales, cherts, marly limestones in fine alternations—aconfiguration referred to as ‘Schiefer-Hornstein Complex’—form the main ridge of the Narthacium. The ‘Schiefer-Hornstein Complex’ also fills the basins of Rizi and Narthaki in the highlands above town. In terms of tectonics, the region is situated in one of the major fault

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1 For the locations discussed in this and the following sections, see the maps in Plates 1–11.
2 ΦΕΚ 87, A, August 2010, p. 1791.
3 Stählin 1924, pp. 135–144; Béquignon, RE Suppl. xii (1970) cols. 1038–1084, s.v. ‘Pharsalos’; IACP, pp. 682; 702–704.
4 Cf. Decourt, ITThess 1, p. 60. For an assessment of the Pharsalian domain based on ‘Nearest-Neighbor’ statistical methodology, see the map in Decourt 1990, a, plate 11 c = 1990, plate xiv, fig. 27. The limits of this approach are discussed by Mili 2015, p. 161, note 2.
5 ΕΕΔΦ, pp. 13–16; cf. note 2 above.
6 On the size and boundaries of the Pharsalian territory: IACP, p. 702. See also the map cited at note 4 above and the IACP entries on Euhydrium and Eretria (p. 679), Scotussa (pp. 706–707), Peuma (pp. 715–716), Proerna (p. 716). Further estimates on the territorial extension of Phthiotic and Achaean cities can be found in the earlier study by Corvisier 1991, pp. 146–147; 152–153.
8 A different geological structure is observed at the western and eastern extremities of the Revenia, where these hills almost connect to the Olym and the Othrys ranges with the peaks of Titanos (gneiss, schist) and Chalkodonion (limestone, schist). See Stählin 1924, p. 80; Decourt 1990, pp. 35–36 and plate iv, figs. 4–6.
9 Schiefer-Hornstein Complex Philipson 1950, p. 185 (with earlier bibliography); see also pp. 172–176 on the general geology of the Narthacium. Rizi and Narthaki: p. 6 below.
zones of southern Thessaly, thus being prone to seismic activity of varying strength.10

Much of the land once controlled by Pharsalus was either mountain or lowland bound by mountains. The southern part of this territory (modern municipal units of Pharsala and Narthaki) is occupied by the contreforts of the lower Othrys,11 while the low country in the north (modern municipal unit of Enipeas) is delimited by the long hills of the Revenia.12 In the east (modern municipal unit of Polydamantas), the minor chain of the Ziragiotis13 guards the routes which connected Pharsalus to the sea.

Encircled in nearly all directions by the curving stream of the Enipeus, the lower Othrys forms a self-contained mountainous region projecting into the west Thessalian plain with the promontory of Proerna at Neo Monastiri. The main ridge of the system, which rises approximately 10 km south of modern Pharsala, is officially known today by the historical name of Mt. Narthacium.14 Many Pharsalians still use the local designation Kassidiaris, or 'Mangy Head', a word which imaginatively captures the scarred appearance of this karstic landscape, unevenly covered by scrub and deeply scored by cracks and fissures.15 Here, in the southwest reaches of the Othrys massif, the territory of ancient Pharsalus gave way to the domains of Phthiotic Achaia.

10 Papadimitriou and Karakostas 2003, p. 402, table 2. On the seismic episodes associated with the Pharsala and Sophades fault segments, see the table in ΕΛΑΕΦ, p. 82, with the corresponding entries in Papazachos and Papazachou 1997, pp. 216; 221–222; 277; 278–279.
12 Revenia: Kriegk 1858, pp. 36–37; Philippsson 1950, pp. 67–72; Decourt 1990, pp. 35–36. On the toponym, which may date back to the High Middle Ages (Anna Comm. 5, 5, 8), see Georgiades 1894, pp. 25–47.
13 Ziragiotis: Philippsson 1950, pp. 169–172. On current maps these relief are no longer indicated by a collective name but by the individual name of each peak, e.g. HMGS General Use Map, 1985 edition, sheet 'Velestino'. The older denomination Tziragiotika—from Tziragi, a village at the east end of the chain mentioned by Leake 1835, p. 452 (most probably the same as Philippson's Serantzi, modern Perivlepto)—appears to have fallen into disuse since before the 1950s.
14 On the uncertain identification of this ridge with the ancient Narthakion oros (X. HS 4, 3, 3–9; Plu. Ages. 16, 5) see the bibliography in Lattecheff 1882, pp. 359–360. The name may have applied to another mountain in the modern municipality of Lamia, near the archaeological site of Narthakion (IACR, p. 687); Stählin 1924, pp. 187–188; Spinelli 2008, p. 15.
15 Stählin 1924, p. 83, note 1; Philippsson 1950, p. 173.

Two series of foothills issue from the Narthacium to the north, marking its junction with the Pharsalian plain: the easternmost is a low ridge crowned by the remains of the ancient citadel, still visible over the double summit of the Prophitis Ilias peak.16 The other is a loftier, more imposing cluster of elevations which once guarded Pharsalus' southwest boundary with the nearby city of Proerna. There appears to be no specific designation for these hills, although the area is generically known as Alogopati, or 'Horse Trail' district.17 A deep pass aptly named Steni, or 'Narrow',18 cleaves the Alogopati hills at their farthest northwest point, opening onto the great vistas of the western Thessalian Plain and connecting Pharsalus to the major transhellenic routes that crossed central Thessaly.19

Between the two hill systems described above unfolds a natural "amphitheater of gentle and undulating reliefs"20 which skirts the southern Pharsalian basin alongside the ancient road departing from the city's east gate (now National Road E65). During Ottoman times the region was known as the Chaidaria valley, emphasizing the association of this meadowland to the old Pharsalian suburb by the same name.21 Current topographic maps identify the same area as Mavrochoma, or 'Black Soil',22 possibly an allusion to the moist nature of the land, which stands in stark contrast with the barren look of the hills rising above it. Morphologically as well as topographically the Mavrochoma acts as a bridge between the lowlands of the Enipeus floodplain and the high country stretching from the southern end of town to the slopes of the Narthacium. Gently tilted in the direction of the city, this rolling

16 Prophitis Ilias and adjacent reliefs: Philippsson 1897, pp. 66–67; 1950, pp. 63–64. The Pharsalian hills reach their highest point northeast of the city with Mt. Thronos (or Sourla: 429 msl).
17 The name appears as early as 1886 in Heuzey's map, where it is used to designate the northermost elevation in the system, now known as Karapala hill; cf. Georgiades 1894. p. 24. The Alogopati reliefs peak at 521 msl with Mt. Grivas; see p. 12 below.
18 HMGS General Use Map, 1985 edition, sheet 'Fársala' [Plate 111]; cf. the former denomination Bogazi (from Turkish boğaz, 'gorge') recorded in the Geological Map of Greece, 1964 edition, sheet 'Farsala'. For a detailed account of the area, see Philippsson 1897, p. 66.
19 See p. 15 below.
20 Heuzey 1886, p. 133. On the recurrence of this amphitheatrical configuration in Thessalian geography and its impact on the layout of Thessalian cities, see Plin. Nat. 4, 30.
21 Cf. Heuzey 1886, p. 133 and plan viii, 'Région de Pharsale'. Chaidaria is the westernmost of the three oikismoi or developments of the Pharsala municipal unit, the other two being Stathmos and Rizi, respectively to the north and south of town.
22 HMGS General Use Map, 1985 edition, sheet 'Fársala' [Plate 111].