CHAPTER ONE

THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE OF EPICNEMIDIAN LOCRA: THE HISTORICAL CONDITIONS OF ITS PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The area that was known as Epicnemidian Locris in Antiquity is a region of central Greece lying on the eastern seaboard of the Balkan Peninsula, on the shores of the Aegean Sea. Its borders probably coincided, approximately, with Mount Cnemis in the east, the Callidromus massif in the south and the Spercheius river basin in the west. The waters of the Malian Gulf and the Island of Euboea lay to the North.

It is a small region (now approximately 374 sq km) but its topography is very varied. Today there are wide plains along the coast, but inland precipitous mountains alternate with deep valleys carved out by fluvial erosion produced by seasonal streams over the centuries.

A typically Mediterranean climate prevails in the region: mild winters with little rainfall, and dry, hot summers. The average annual temperature...
is 16.5°, and the dry season can last for five months (Figure 1.1). However, the summer heat is tempered by sea breezes and, in particular, the frequent Etesian winds from the northern Aegean. The high mountains running Northwest-Southeast along the peninsula’s West seaboard shelter Locris from the humid westerly winds, and its position in the region, enclosed by the surrounding mountains—Mount Telethrium in Euboea, the Othrys in Phthiotis, the Oeta and the Callidromus—means that its annual rainfall is very moderate (an average of about 500 mm a year): less than half that recorded (>1200 mm) at a similar latitude in the area around the Gulf of Patrae on the Ionian Sea.¹

This climate has produced vegetation that is well suited to dry summers. However, the vegetation that succeeded the dense woods covering the mountains this side of the Aegean during the Quaternary interglacial peri-

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¹ Maroukian and Karymbalis 2004.