CHAPTER FOUR

THE NECROPOLEIS OF EPICNEMIDIAN
LOCRIS AND DIPOTAMOS VALLEY

Maria-Foteini Papakonstantinou* and Efi Karantzali*

1. INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, the study of necropoleis provides us with information on life expectancy, living standards, cultural affinities, social organisation and burial customs that can be discussed and lead to interesting conclusions. Cemeteries should be treated as a mirror of life when abundant funerary material is available, and even when data are limited, as in the case of the necropoleis of the area studied.

The region of the Epicnemidian Locrians (Figure 4.1) extended west and south of Mt. Cnemis and north and east from of Mt. Callidromus. To the west lay Malis, Oetaea and Aenis, to the south Doris and Phocis, to the east Opuntian Locris and to the north, the Malian and Euboean Gulfs.¹

The western part of Epicnemidia was a mountainous region between Mt. Oeta and the River Latzorema, with Mt. Callidromus to the south. In this area three ancient settlements (probably poleis) have been located at Psylopyrgos (ancient Alponus), Roumelio-Platanakos (ancient Nicaea) and Paliokastro Anavras.

Psylopyrgos was a coastal fortified hill of strategic importance, which probably formed part of the Thermopylae defensive system. It lies to the north of the Athens-Lamia national highway, close to the East Gate of the Thermopylae Pass. It has been inhabited from the Middle Helladic period to Early Byzantine times and has been convincingly identified with the ancient small polis of Alponus (Alpenus). Alponus had a port, worshiped

* Fourteenth Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities.
¹ For the ancient topography of all the sites mentioned below see Pascual, Chapter 2, and Papakonstaninou and Zachos, Chapter 3 in this volume.
Demeter Thesmophoriae and probably Heracles at the Melampygus Rock. The Anopaea path also led to the city.

About two kilometres to the east and three kilometres from the East Gate of Thermopylae, the site Roumelio/Platanakos has been identified with the polis of Nicaea. This was a port city in a defensive position that guarded the Thermopylae Pass, and was founded in Classical times; it flourished during the Hellenistic period and was also inhabited in the Roman and Byzantine periods.

To the south, at a strategic position on the plateau of Anavra, there is an ancient site whose name has not yet been identified with any certainty. At the site of Palaiokastro, a fortified acropolis with the best-preserved wall in the whole Epicnemidian Locris is sited on a high crest. Palaiokastro was either a polis or a fortified settlement during the Classical and Hellenistic periods.

There is, so far, no evidence of cemeteries associated with the cities of Alponus and Nicaea. However, at Palaiokastro Anavras, part of a Late Geometric cemetery has been excavated and tombs dating to Classical and Hellenistic periods are also reported, showing that the site was inhabited during these periods.

Further East, in the valleys of Mendenitsa, Potamia and Aivlassiorema, are the ancient towns of Scarphelia and Mendenitsa (probably ancient Augeae) and the remains of two fortresses, one at Profitis Ilias/Karavydia

*Figure 4.1. Map of the Necropoleis of Epicnemidian Locris and Dipotamos valley.*