CHAPTER FIVE

THE FORTIFICATIONS OF EPICNEMIDIAN LOCRIX

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If the dating of Greek walls, which is done primarily on the basis of the style of masonry used, is in general very controversial, in the case of Epicnemidian Locris the problems are considerably exacerbated by the walled enclosures being in a worse state of preservation than in other parts of central Greece. In fact, apart from the exceptional case of Pallaikastro Anavras, in various places (Alponus, Nicaea, Thronium, Scarpheia, Tachtali/Ities and Palianifitsa) no traces remain or only a few disperse blocks. In others, little more than the first course has survived (Cnemides, the polygonal “Lesbian” wall of Naryca and Karavydha/Profitis Illias), and in another (Mendenitsa) the ancient ashlars have been reused and modified in such a way that it is difficult to determine their original position and ancient style. Except for Cnemides, preserved to some extent by the high and steep terrain, walls are in a worse state of preservation in the coastal sites than the inland sites in the south, at the heads of valleys. This is mainly due to the fact that the stone of these settlements has frequently been used by the inhabitants of the modern towns near the coast, especially from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (Buchon could still see the wall of Thronium in 1840 and Grundy and Oldfather that of Alponus in the first third of the twentieth century). Another of the great difficulties is that there has been little excavation in this region. In fact, with the exception of some necropoleis and the Dipotamos valley, this absence is felt to a greater extent than in other regions of central Greece. Epicnemidian Locris is one of the least studied and, therefore, least known regions of central Greece. In view of the lack of systematic excavations and the poor state of preservation of the walls over the last two centuries, in order to obtain information about them and to establish their style and chronology we must rely on ancient sources such as

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the reports by various travellers, toponymy, stylistic observations, for which we have no minimally precise chronological control, as well as surface pottery, the use of which is very problematic3 since its relationship with the period when the walls were constructed is difficult to establish. So in most cases it is only possible to offer some hypotheses.

We have also used the possible style of the walls of the known sites, where they fit in with the traditional chronological sequence: uncoursed polygonal, “Lesbian” polygonal, trapezoidal isodomic, isodomic ashlar, mortar and tile,4 the dating established for the neighbouring regions, Opuntian Locris, Malis, Thessaly, Phocis and Boeotia, thus setting Epicnemidian Locris in its superregional context, and, finally, the interpretation of the historical vicissitudes that afflicted the region.

Within the usual classification of styles of Greek walls, several are apparently absent in Epicnemidian Locris, or if they ever existed, nothing remains today. We refer to the uncoursed polygonal, pseudo-isodomic and isodomic ashlar with headers interposed in the courses, the latter two styles dating principally to the Hellenistic period.5

The “Lesbian” polygonal style is found in the acropolis of Naryca (Plate 5.1 A–B) and perhaps also in other Locrian poleis. Several towers, such as Skopia or Blesia, if the two belonged to Locris and not Phocis, and the fortresses of Kastraki (Plate 5.2) and Stefani in Epicnemidian Locris, if it dates to Antiquity rather than the Byzantine period, and Agnanti/Profitis Ilias, in the Dipotamos valley,6 were built in rubble. Alponus was walled in the fifth or third century, perhaps also in the polygonal style (Plates 5.3 A–B). In contrast with the walling styles of which no examples have been found, the trapezoidal isodomic style is seen in the region at Palaiokastro Anavras (Plates 5.4 and 5.5). It is a form of construction that is virtually absent from Opuntian

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4 See Fossey 1986: 121: of the whole chronological sequence only mortar and tile clearly belonged to the Roman and subsequent period. Cf. also Lawrence 1979: 235.
5 Cf. in general, McNicoll and Milner 1997. Pseudo-isodomic ashlar can be found, for example, in Opuntian Locris at Cynus/Livanates (Blackman 1998: 34) and Paleokastra, both dated to the fourth century (Blackman 1999: 74); in Lamia, in Malis, to the second half of the fourth century (Catling 1986: 43; 1988: 36; 1989: 49; French 1993: 51; Blackman 1998: 73); Domokos, in southern Thessaly, to the fourth century (Catling 1986: 44) and in Naupactus (Catling 1987: 43).
6 At Profitis Ilias to the northeast of the modern village of Agnanti there are traces of fortification walls as well as coarse and Roman pottery. See Papakonstantinou and Zachos in Chapter 3.