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Proceedings of the 15th Symposium on
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The Walled Towns of Thesprotia: from the Hellenistic Foundation to the Roman Destruction

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The regions of Thesprotia and Cassopeia demonstrate the relevant phenomenon of urbanization, which starts in the 4th century BC, has its acme during Hellenism and comes to a brutal end in 2nd century BC, as a result of the Roman conquest. The purpose of this analysis is to better understand the reasons behind this phenomenon through archaeological data and historical literary sources.

Until the 4th century BC, according to ancient sources, Epirotes were organized in villages; Pseudoskilace¹ tells us that Chaones, Thesprotians, Cassopians and Molossians *oikousi kata komas*; more importantly they lived, according to Thucydides,² by *aiteikistous komas*, unfortified villages. This feature is not of secondary importance as these sites will be discovered and remembered in the 19th century thanks to their powerful fortifications: “les vieilles forteresses sans nom et sans histoire” (Gillieron 1877 cited in Dausse 2002: 177 n.1). Those villages were grouped by *ethnos* and thus varied in dimension from small to very large communities. The populations were then gathered in larger communities, such as the koinon of Epirotes, which stretched from Tepelen to the Ambracian Gulf (from north to south) and from the Ionian coast to the Pindus ranges. As the process of urbanism developed with the process of the unification of Epirus, we must mention the sources that give us the general outline of this phenomenon. The unification of the Epirote koinon is testified by two inscriptions of the Thearodokes: the first one, dating back to 360 BC and related to Epidauron, mentioned that the *theores* had to negotiate Pandosia, Cassope, Poionos, Corcyra, Arthichia and Chaoia and Molossia before arriving at Ambracia: seven stops corresponding to seven different ‘political forces’. 30 years later, the inscription from Argos reports that the *Theores* who came to announce the *Heraia* had to speak only to Cleopatra, queen of the Molossians in Phoinike. In 330 BC the Eacides unified the Molossians, Thesprotians, Cassopeians, as well as the inhabitants of the Elean Greek colonies (Cabanès 2010: 121-23). The koinon of the Epirotes reached its final union in 295 BC, when Pyrros had the same authority over the Chaones and the Molossian kingdom, as demonstrated by the fact that the army that fought in Italy was composed of Chaones, Thesprothes and Molossians (Cabanès 2010: 123).

Regarding Cassopia there are some historical events that are relevant to the process of urbanization. The first step towards urbanization was the foundation of the Elean colonies around the 8th and 7th centuries BC: Pandosia, Elatria, Battiai and Bouchetion. Although the history of these colonies is not well known, they are thought to have belonged to the establishment of new settlements by the Eleans, before the foundation of Ambracia by Corinth (Riginos 2010: 62-3). Starting from the 6th century BC the Corinthian colony quickly became the main political and economic centre of this area. At the end of the 5th

century BC the Cassopeians detached from the Thesprotian *ethnos* and formed their own. A turning point in the history of the region was Philip II's military intervention: in 343 BC he occupied the Elean colonies, leaving them to the Molossian king, Alexander I, who besieged and conquered Ambracia in 338 BC. With full freedom of action and complete control over the resources once controlled by the Greek colonies, Cassope, founded in 380-360 BC, became the main centre of the region; the Hellenistic boundaries of its territory were more or less the same as the modern department of Preveza. Under Pyrros the whole region was adorned and enriched. From 234 BC Cassope and its territory entered the Epirote Alliance and reached the acme of its power and influence; the city itself was expanded and many public monuments were built. Its prosperity was brutally interrupted by the Roman conquest in 168 BC (Riginos 2010: 62-5).

More or less the same historical events had already taken place in Thesprotia; the military power of Philip II limited the eastern boundaries of the region and obliged the Thesprotians to head north, pushing their boundaries to the Kalamas River. Thesprotians were also obliged under political pressure to join the Epirote Alliance, formed by the Molossian and Thesprotian powers around 333-323 BC; around the same time Gitana became the capital city (Lazari and Kanta-Kitsou 2010: 35-7). Urban development prospered also during the reign of Pyrros (293-272 BC), who in order to strengthen the defense of his kingdom promoted the establishment of strongholds, citadels, and forts. Starting from the 4th century BC and especially during the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC Thesprotia reached an important level of economic and political development, linked to population growth and the creation of structured cities that reflected the organization of the smaller communities (for example *Elina* as the seat of the *Elinoi Thesprotoi*, *Phanote* as the seat of the *Phanoteis*) (Lazari and Kanta-Kitsou 2010: 36-7).

The positioning of most fortified settlements of the Late Classical and Hellenistic periods was dictated by geomorphological and strategic needs. Fragmentation of natural topography contributed to relative isolation of the various tribes, which were organized around a residential centre in river valleys, around small plains, or on mountain highlands. For Cassopia we can distinguish three kinds of urban settlement: Elean colonies, some medium-sized Cassopeian sites (between 4-8ha, such as Kastrosykia and Berenike), and rural sites. By the 4th century BC there were different settlement types that fitted perfectly within the former urban grid. Cities, such as the Elean colonies, were 10km apart and the secondary rural settlements were 2-4km apart. Nevertheless the size of cities is very average and that is probably one of the reasons for the foundation of Cassope (Corvisier 1993: 85-7). In Thesprotia the numeric progression of urban settlements is meaningful: 8 in the 5th century, 21 in the 4th century, and more than 60 in the 3rd century BC. We can see a sort of hierarchy in these towns: small settlements (i.e. *Phanoute*, *Elina*, *Ephyra*),

¹ Ps-Scylax, Periplus. 29, 31, 32, 33.

² Tuc. 3, 94, 4.

medium ones (Aetos, Titana), and large (Toroné). The choice, here as well as in Cassopia, was to have a functional grid of settlements, formed by small and medium towns, with one larger capital; the distance between the settlements varies from 10 to 15km (Corvisier 1993: 88-9).

	Ratio between urban sites (+ 5 ha.) and the total of settlements	Hierarchy of cities
Cassopia	7/22.....31.8%	4 of 5/10 ha 1 of 13/30 ha 2 of +30 ha
Thesprotia	7/23.....30.5%	3 of 5/10 ha 3 of 10/30 ha 1 of +30 ha

TABLE 1: AFTER CORVISIER (1993: 88)

Regarding the chronology of this phenomenon we can identify three main phases, approximately corresponding to the phases 1C, 1D, 1E of military architecture listed by Neritan Ceka (1993: 125-31). The first phase, starting with Epidaurus's Thearodokes list (the first decades of 4th c. BC) indicates the construction of big towns, such as Cassope and Phoinike; as similar results are achieved in the northern regions, we can assume that there were strict political relationships between Illyria and Epirus, with an axis of communication that went north-south. There are many similarities between the enceintes of Cassope and Gitana, as well as Kastritsa in Molossia or, to an extent, Phoinike (The complex morphological site of Phoinike makes comparisons harder; its wall plan can be easily compared to that of Gurezeze, in the hinterland of Apollonia; see Ceka 2010: 653-5.)

The second phase, which begins in the mid-4th century BC, shows the formation of urban agglomerations based on the koina. With the consolidation of the Illyrian and Molossian kingdoms, and the access to resources encouraged by Philip's intervention in the Greek colonies, the Epirote koina embarked on their full economic and social development, which will reach its highpoint in the 3rd century BC. The implicit model of inspiration is the Macedonian kingdom, both in terms of political power and urban development. The reconstruction of the city walls at Edessa (Chrysostomou 1988: 56-7) and Aigai (Girtzy 2001: 55; Faklaris 1996: 70), for example, is only a few decades, if not a few years earlier than the new walls of Cassope and Gitana.

By the third phase, which corresponds to the 3rd century BC, Epirus has reached its full growth: the great capital towns are enlarged and adorned with new public buildings, such as the agoras of Cassope and Gitana; the same phenomenon seems to have occurred in Illyria, such as the agora of Bouthrotos and Byllis, seemingly dating back to the same period (Ceka 1993: 131-32; as Ceka noted, these agoras are all built in a peripheral position, in direct contact with the surroundings).

We therefore have several features that help us understand the reasons behind the origin of these settlements. It is clear that one of the major factors was the desire of the kings (the Molossians and the Eacides) to unify the different Epirote populations under the same crown. The foundation of larger towns has different advantages: better control and taxation advantages, stronger defense, etc.

It is no surprise that the first features to be built in these large towns were not public buildings but city walls; in the Hellenistic world there were only four short periods of peace between 323 BC and 150 BC. The need for protection was a major issue and walls are the first real indication of urban advance. Ceka (2010: 660-61) suggested that these settlements were in the beginning little more than groups of shelters in case of war, and occasionally locations for religious and politic events.

Cassope and Gitana were founded on strategic sites both for the defense and control of the routes which went N-S from Illyria to the Gulf. They also controlled the rivers which brought trade goods from the coast and vice versa. It is interesting to stress also the importance of demographic growth, which is directly linked with economic development. Any growth in population has to correspond with the creation of new resources: not only pastoral and agricultural activities but trade markets, local production, and administration. These factors transformed Epirote settlements from military outpost to real 'cities'.

By the end of the 3rd century BC Epirus had a number of urban settlements partially developed by the influence of Greek colonies (Ambracia, the Elean colonies, Epidamnos-Dyrrachium) and partially developed to answer the more complex needs of the local populations: religious, administrative, defensive and economic.

Cassope was founded on a plateau between 650-550m.a.s.l. on the western slopes of the Zalongo Mountains, around 380-360 BC. The site is a naturally strategic one but it was further enhanced with powerful fortifications. The site is enclosed to the north by a rocky crest, with two sides used as bastions or strongholds built of polygonal masonry. The city itself was protected by a wall of polygonal masonry with a width varying from 3.20-3.60m and with two acropolises; the walls were about 2800m long (Riginos 2010: 65-6; Kontogianni 2006: 21-2). The southern side of the city was fortified only at the more vulnerable points. To strengthen the fortification during the 3rd century BC the Cassopeians built a front bastion (*proteichisma*) on the south-west side of the city, where also new walls enclosed the Hellenistic expansion of the site; the fortification was completed by square towers and a *diatechisma*, a transversal wall, situated at the point of access to the interior of Cassope (Riginos 2010: 67-9; Kontogianni 2006: 24-6).

The central axis of Cassope linked the two main gates of the city; the western one features a semi-circular arch, one of the earliest examples in Greek fortifications. The excavations also brought to light 3 posterns that were used in times of peace as a secondary access to the city; one had a vaulted ceiling. The urban plan of the city seems to recall the 5th-century plan of Ambracia: *stenopoi* of 4-5m intersected the two main *plateiai* that ran E-W forming *insulae* 30m long (Riginos 2010: 69-70; Ceka 2010: 651-2). The agora of Cassope was built at the southeastern part of the city, directly linked with one of the main avenues: it was the religious, political and economic centre of the city, and from the end of 3rd century it became a monumental feature, with the creation of two *stoai* and a *prytaneion* as well as a *bouleuterion* at the east side of the square. Near the eastern part of the diatechisma, a small temple dedicated to Aphrodite was found. The theatre was excavated in the rocks to north, just under the acropolis (Riginos 2010: 72; Kontogianni 2006: 25-30).

The private houses were oriented south, with the entrance facing the street, and organized on two storeys; the type of construction

is inspired by the 5th-century BC houses of Ambracia. During the 3rd century BC some houses were rebuilt in a monumental way, another sign of the relative prosperity of the city.

Gitana was created on the northern bank of the Kalamas River, in an area that the Thesprotians had recently conquered from the Chaonians. At first sight its position may seem peculiar, as it does not seem to be a fully naturally protected site (as was the case at Cassope). Although Gitana does not occupy the top of a hill, the location is still naturally fortified by river meanders and the Vrysella Mountains. The site also offers a perfect panoramic view of the Kalamas, the northern Thesprotian coastline, and visual contact with the coastal fortification of Mastilitsa, Pyrgos Ragiou and Lygia. The river was navigable from the Ionian coast and the city itself, with its fortifications on the delta, acted as an obligatory staging post along the trade routes (the fortification system is well illustrated in Christophilopoulou 2004: 192-96).

The outer fortifications of Gitana surround the city from all sides and it is reinforced with frontal retrenchments and rectangular towers; their lengths would have extended originally to 2400m and there are some remains surviving today to a height of 2-3m. The retrenchments were constructed on the southwest side of the fortifications where there is natural protection, while the towers are located where the site was most vulnerable. Gitana has also the only example of a semi-circular tower, guarding the northwest corner of the city and the access to the Kalama valley (Lazari and Kanta-Kitsou 2010: 39-41). Probably belonging to a later period, like at Cassope, is the internal partition wall (*diatichisma*) which isolates the administrative centre of the city. Three main gates provided access to the city as well as three small posterns: the main gate was in the middle of the north side of fortification, the second gate connected the southern part of the city with the theatre, and the south gate led to the harbour on the river (Lazari and Kanta-Kitsou 2010: 43-4).

Like Cassope, Gitana was planned on a Hippodamean grid, based on a system of intersecting roads which formed orthogonal insulae. The excavations focused mainly on an area of the partition walls, and little is known about the settlement's private houses (Lazari and Kanta-Kitsou 2010: 45-49). The agora at Gitana was located at the foot of Mount Vrysella, designed as an open square and closed with a stoa. The southern part was defined by a stone-paved road and 16 shops; the road led from the economic center of the city to its southern part, where the harbour facilities were located. The political centre of the city was the theatre that hosted the Thesprotian koinon and gatherings; built in stone, it is the only identified theatre in Thesprotia.

The highpoint for fortified settlements in Cassopia and Thesprotia is fixed between the 3rd and early 2nd centuries BC. In 167 BC the legions of Aemilius Paulus devastated Epirus, destroying 70 cities and enslaving 150,000 prisoners, as recorded by Polybius. Cassope had its walls destroyed (Riginos 2010: 70). The same fate happened to Gitana, where only that part of the city separated by the partition wall showed some signs of any continuity (Lazari and Kanta-Kitsou 2010: 49). The Romans employed

these destructive tactics as a punishment and to prevent riots and rebellions at strategically important locations on their supply routes. Many citizens from Cassope were also relocated to the new colony of Nicopolis, which assumed complete control of the Ambracian Gulf. By the end of the 2nd century BC the economic, political and social situation of Cassopia and Thesprotia was irrevocably altered.

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FIG. 1: PLAN OF EPIRUS SHOWING CASSOPIA AND THESPROTIA

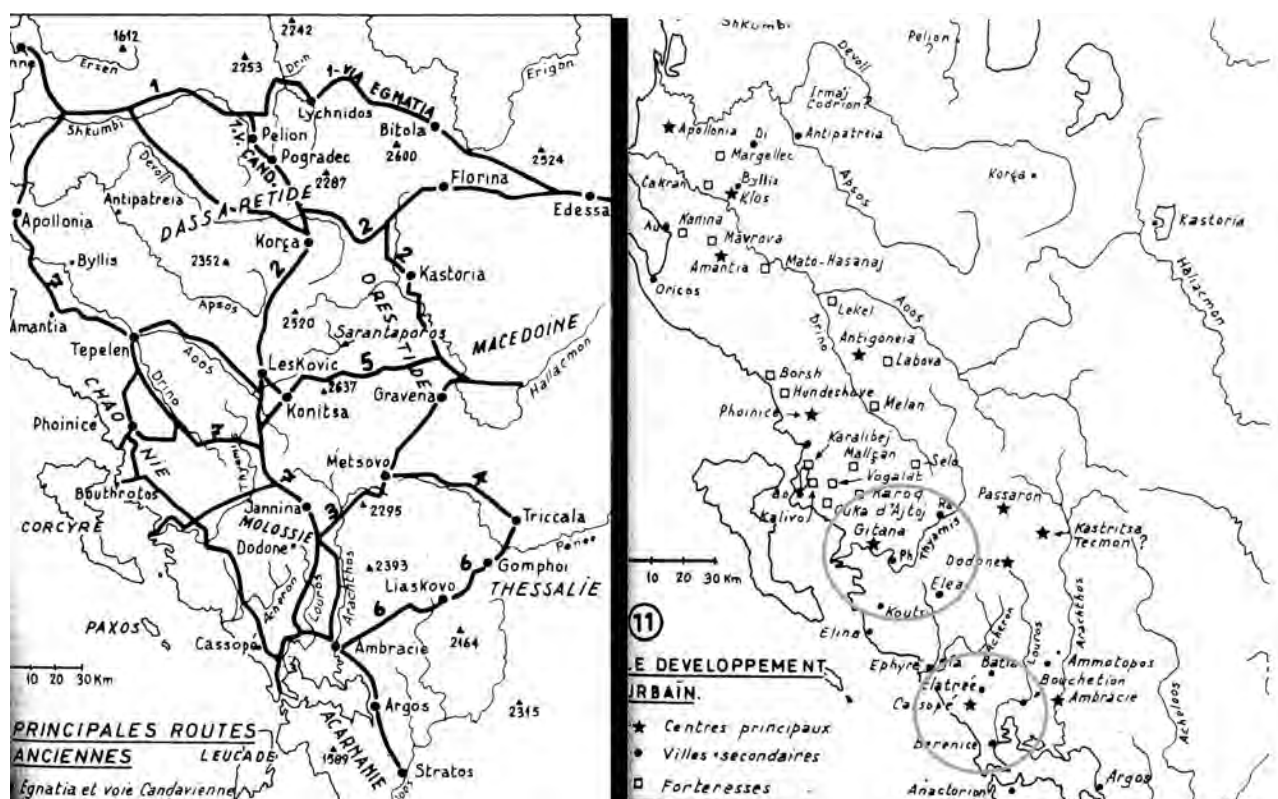


FIG. 2: PLANS OF EPIRUS. MAIN TRADE ROUTES (LEFT). THE TWO CAPITAL CITIES WITH THEIR SURROUNDING SETTLEMENTS (RIGHT) (AFTER CABANES 1976) SURROUNDING SETTLEMENTS.



FIG.3: THE PROTEICHISMA FROM CASSOPE (KONTOGIANNI 2006)

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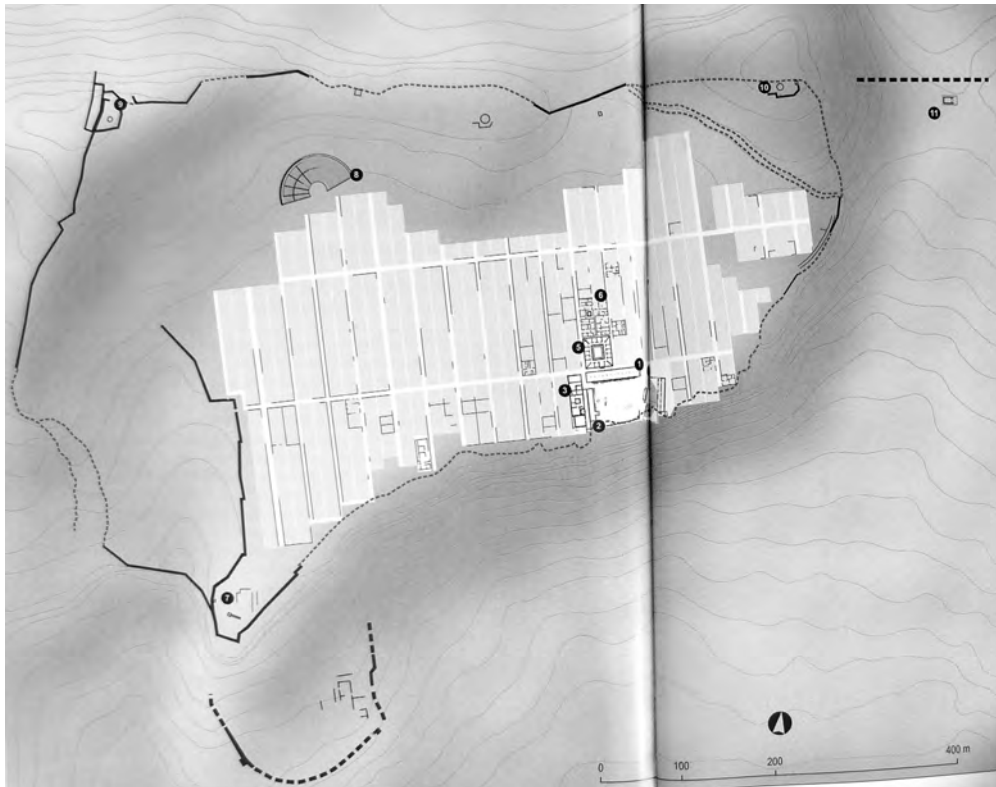


FIG. 4: URBAN PLAN OF CASSOPE (KONTOGIANNI 2006)



FIG. 5: AERIAL VIEW OF CASSOPE (KONTOGIANNI 2006)



FIG. 6: NORTHERN FORTIFICATIONS OF GITANA (FROM [HTTP://ODYSSEUS.CULTURE.GR/H/3/EH3560.JSP?OBJ_ID=2640](http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/3/eh3560.jsp?obj_id=2640))

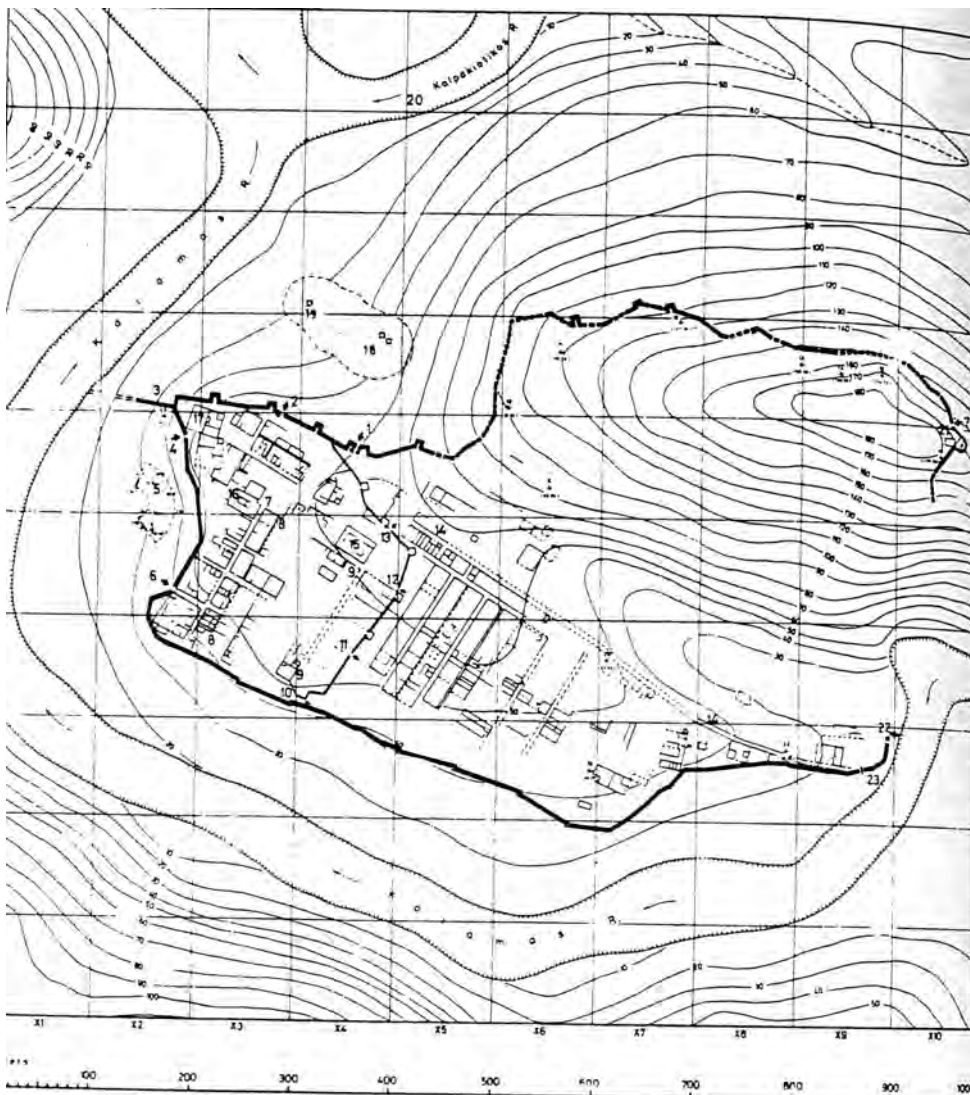


FIG. 7: URBAN PLAN OF GITANA (CABANES 1976)

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FIG. 8: THE PAVED ROAD TO THE THEATRE IN GITANA (LAZARI AND KATA-KITSOU 2010)