

Locating the Battle of the River Aous: A New Analysis

This paper presents my new interpretation of the Battle of the River Aous in 198 BC, the first major battle between the Macedonians and the Romans in the Second Macedonian War. Livy (32.5.9 - 32.6.8; 32.9.6 - 32.13.5) and Plutarch (*Vit. Flam.* 3.4 - 5.1) both describe this episode in detail. Previous scholars, particularly Leake (1835), Kromayer (1907), and Hammond (1966), have attempted to locate the battleground. Based on fieldwork conducted between 2013 and 2015, including the initial season of the Vjosë River Valley Archaeological Project in southern Albania (2015), I propose a new location for the battlefield as well as a new understanding of the relevant troop movements and supply routes.

Initial topographical analysis was conducted during four separate trips to the region, during which time I determined that the battle must have taken place in a part of the Vjosë river valley just north of the modern village of Peshtan, Albania. A formal architectural survey was then conducted, the primary goal of which was to determine whether there were any built remains of Philip's fortifications in the valley, and if the landscape aligned with the descriptions in Livy and Plutarch.

I co-directed the initial season of the Vjosë River Valley Archaeological Project between July 22nd and August 18th as a collaboration between the University of Pennsylvania and the Albanian Regional Directory of National Culture, Gjirokaster. We surveyed the valley to find and document all standing architectural features and cleared them of their extensive plant cover. A geological survey was conducted at the same time to determine how the landscape had changed since antiquity. The architectural elements, along with the natural features of the landscape including several river terraces, were recorded using photogrammetry along with more traditional methods of survey. Additionally, we conducted an ethnographic project, interviewing

the many active shepherds of the region to record their understanding of the history and development of the valley.

The landscape of this valley aligns exactly with Livy's description of the battleground as well as the placements of Philip's and Flaminius' camps. The natural river terraces as well as the placement between the river and the sheer mountains is well suited for the system of defenses that Livy and Polybius describe Philip V using. This is further supported by an inscription (*SEG* 40.524) found near Amphipolis that transmits Philip's instructions on camp building.

While we didn't find any architecture that can be definitively assigned to Philip's camp, we did discover architectural remains indicating that this area was of military significance under Antonine rule, under Ali Pasha in the early 19th century, in World War II, and during Albania's Communist period, indicating the military importance of this area through time. Additional extensive hiking through the region, alongside proposed routes created through GIS modeling, has provided the basis for a new interpretation of the troop movements and supply routes related to the valley. Importantly, these routes are highly consistent with Livy's narrative.

A better understanding of this battle and the campaign season of 198 BC enables us to better understand the aims and goals of the Romans as they began their eastward expansion, as well as how the Macedonians chose to respond to the Roman threat.

Bibliography

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