ARRC – Acculturation, Romanisation, Roman Culture: Processes of Integration Across the Roman Empire

Edited by László Borhy, Kata Dévai, Linda Dobosi, and Csilla Sáró

DISSERTATIONES ARCHAEOLOGICAE
ex Instituto Archaeologico
Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



DissArch

Supplementum 5 | 2026

Dissertationes Archaeologicae
ex Instituto Archaeologico
Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae

Supplementum 5

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ISSN 2064-4574 (online)

Publisher
Lénárt Darázs

The journal is supported by the ELTE Journal Development Fund of Eötvös Loránd University.
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Budapest, 23–25 May 2025



Edited by
László Borhy – Kata Dévai – Linda Dobosi – Csilla Sáró

Budapest, 2026

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Borhy, L. – Dévai, K. – Dobosi, L. – Sáró, Cs. (eds): ARRC – Acculturation, Romanisation, Roman Culture: Processes of Integration Across the Roman Empire. *Dissertationes Archaeologicae Supplementum* 5 (2026) 109–142. 10.17204/dissarch.suppl.5.2026.109

Transformations along the western part of the Via Egnatia in Roman Antiquity

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Received 3 November 2025 | Accepted 9 April 2026 | Published 18 November 2026

Abstract: The impact of major roads on ancient societies is still largely a matter of scholarly speculation. The rare references in the historical sources are vague and ambiguous and a standardised method of evaluating this impact with the help of the archaeological record is lacking. This study examines the role of the Via Egnatia, the main land corridor that connected the Adriatic and Aegean coasts, in shaping the regional urban geography and the spread of Roman culture, as manifested in the distribution of imported tableware. Only the areas gravitating towards the landlocked, western segment of the Egnatian road are considered. A diachronic perspective is adopted, looking at the transformations in urban geography and the concomitant spread of imported fine ceramics from the time of the Roman conquest to the end of Antiquity. The main conclusion is that the construction of the Via Egnatia had a delayed but profound impact on the distribution of wealth and urbanity in the adjacent areas. However, from a long-term perspective, this was a transitory episode and, with the collapse of central authority towards the end of Antiquity, the system returned to the 'pre-Egnatian' stage.

Keywords: Via Egnatia, Roman Antiquity, towns, tableware imports

Introduction

Via Egnatia, the celebrated interregional road between Apollonia/Dyrrhachium (near present-day Polan and Durrës in Albania, respectively) and Byzantium (Istanbul, Turkey), constructed by the Romans soon after the final annexation of Macedonia in 148 BC, does not require a lengthy introduction.[1] It was one of the first major infrastructural projects carried out by Rome outside Italy and, no less significantly, it was the only project of such scale implemented in the newly-conquered area prior to the reign of Augustus. The tracing and construction of the 1120 km-long road, marked by a pair of milestones at each mile and conquering both mountainous and marshy terrain would have presented an immense challenge, even from the perspective of modern engineering. It is all the more striking that the Romans managed to complete it within two decades after the founding of the province.[2]

The expediency of this construction is understandable. Without well-maintained roads adapted to wheeled traffic, it would have been impossible to defend and govern the newly acquired possessions in the Balkans. This is paralleled in virtually all provinces in the Balkans and beyond.[3] The conquest

1 For a full history of research see, Fasolo 2008.

2 Certainly by 120 BC, Polyb. *Hist.*, 34.12.4. This refers to the earliest phase of the road, ending at the eastern frontier of the new province: Adams 1982, 269–312; Adams 1986, 17–42; Fasolo 2008, 97–99.

3 Thrace: Madzharov 2009; Moesia Superior: Mirković 2007; Pannonia: Soproni 1980.

✉ Corresponding author

or final pacification and the founding of a new province were soon followed by the construction of roads that followed the most direct routes to Italy. However, the Egnatian Road had an additional importance, providing Rome with a secure land-bridge to the rich Asian provinces which, unlike the pirate-infested maritime routes, could be used year-round. To the Romans, this would have been obvious from the moment they set foot in this area. As early as 190 BC, the Macedonian king Phillip V (221–179 BC), a Roman ally at that time, was asked to provide a secure passage for the Roman troops during their campaign against Antioch III (223–187 BC).[4] Ancient authors were certainly aware of the primary role of the Via Egnatia, and Cicero explicitly calls it a military road.[5]

But what of the other consequences of the construction of the Egnatian Road? In the past, modern scholarship was mostly concerned with searching for the material remains of this road and determining the chronology of repairs and reconstructions from the epigraphic record and the scant information in the written sources.[6] This is somewhat surprising, because elsewhere, the construction of roads of similar rank and importance has been associated with significant changes in local and regional development.[7] From an archaeologist's point of view, these should be readily apparent in the settlement map and the settlement hierarchy, as well as in the presence of imported goods. A recent study has demonstrated that approximately three-quarters of all urban settlements in Roman Pannonia were located on the newly-built corridors that followed the ancient Amber Road or the Sava, the Pannonian counterparts of the Via Egnatia.[8] In addition to the transport of troops and government officials, these roads were central to the spread of Roman culture and Latin language, especially in landlocked provinces. There is no doubt that the Via Egnatia had a comparable effect on the society and economy of Roman Macedonia. Geographically, it was the backbone of this province.

These and other questions related to the Egnatian Road have already been raised in a seminal paper by Yannis Lolos.[9] In this work, he makes a preliminary examination of the social and cultural impact of the Via Egnatia on provincial life, by looking at the distribution of civic status, Roman communities and Italic imports along this road. The conclusion is that the Egnatian Road played a key role not only in the spread of material culture and ideas, but it also shaped the urban geography of Roman Macedonia. Although few would disagree with this conclusion, it is not as demonstrable as it seems at first sight. What to make of the fact that, after the first wave of written references to the Via Egnatia, by contemporaries who lived in the last couple of centuries BC, there are hardly any mentions of this road in the written sources until Late Antiquity?[10] Or the inscriptions commemorating the repairs and reconstruction of the road under Trajan (98–117 AD), which inform that, by then, the famous road had fallen into disrepair?[11] No matter how we view this scant evidence, its intimations challenge the established image of the Egnatian Road as a constantly busy and vibrant conduit of people, goods and ideas. To what extent is the popular image of this ancient highway a modern myth?

Following Lolos' lead, the present study aims to analyse the transformations of the urban network in the parts of Roman Macedonia that border on the Egnatian Road and evaluate the capacity of this network to provide the hinterland with high-order services and imported goods. The underpinning

4 Adams 1982, 274–275.

5 Wallbank 1985, 193–210.

6 Gounaropoulou – Hatzopoulos 1985; Adam-Veleni 2003, 109–114; Amore *et al.* 2005, 336–360; Kaimaris *et al.* 2009.

7 Laurence 1999; Laurence 2012, 67–94.

8 Donev 2024, 33–52.

9 Lolos 2009, 264–284.

10 Fasolo 2008, 53–63.

11 Adams 1993, 29–39.

assumption is taken from Central Place Theory (henceforth CPT), which, provided that a certain set of conditions are met, postulates that the logistics of demand and supply will result in a patterned spacing of urban rank.[12] As will soon transpire, the classical CPT models, in their basic form, (market and transportation varieties) do not apply to our study area. This has to do with the political fragmentation, the dramatic variations in relief and population density and, more detrimentally, the incomplete settlement maps. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to examine the spatial projection of the urban hierarchy along the Egnatian Road and its potential role in the supply of the adjacent areas with imported goods. The absence of any obvious structuring will be no less interesting against the data for the spread of imported goods.[13]

The chronological limits of this paper encompass the entire period of Roman Antiquity, from the time of the conquest and subsequent construction of the Via Egnatia to the end of Antiquity. Needless to mention, a truly diachronic approach routinely practiced by sociologists or modern historians is beyond our reach. The study will essentially look and compare the situation at three consecutive stages during this long period. These are the Late Republic or better known locally as Hellenistic-Roman, which also approximates the situation in the pre-conquest period, the time of the High Empire and the last couple of centuries of Antiquity, following the reforms of the Tetrarchs and Constantine I (306–337 AD).

Because the ultimate goal is to evaluate the role of the Egnatian Road in the spread of Roman culture and ideas, it makes sense to limit the study to the landlocked, western half of the road. The aim is to ignore the likely influx of imported goods from port-towns to the adjacent inland areas via secondary and local roads. To this end, the focus shall be on the segment between Dyrrhachium and Apollonia on the Adriatic Coast and Thessaloniki (Greece) on the northern Aegean. This western leg of the Via Egnatia was the only link to the outside world for an extensive area. Its limits cannot be drawn in a non-arbitrary way. Due care was taken to exclude areas potentially serviced by other interprovincial roads, but the inclusion of segments of these roads near their junctions with the Via Egnatia was inescapable. The end-result is a roughly rectangular strip of land, extending for up to 70 km on both side of the road (Fig. 1). It includes parts of northern Epirus, southern Illyria, Upper and Lower Macedonia and Paeonia. We have also extended the study-area to Amphipolis (present-day Amphipoli, Greece) on the east, to include the landlocked area around modern Lake Volvi, which also depended on the Egnatian road for access to the coast. The Strymon Valley and eastern Macedonia are left out from this analysis.

Methodology and data acquisition

The urban geography and hierarchy

The sheer distribution of towns and town-like settlements in the study-area will suffice to give the reader an idea of the extent of urban coverage during the period under study. However, in order to identify a structure in the urban map, it is necessary to order the known towns into distinct hierarchical tiers. In view of the uneven quality of the data, especially between the different phases of the period under study, this endeavour is ridden by a number of difficulties. Ideally, when assigning individual settlements to discrete ranks, it is best to consider as many attributes as possible. Focusing on a single attribute, like size or status, is potentially misleading.[14] Unfortunately, this is not equally applicable to all three phases of the period under consideration.

12 King 1985; for applications in Roman archaeology, see the overview in Bekker-Nielsen 2020, 81–97.

13 See Blake 1980, 4–12.

14 Bekker-Nielsen 2020, 86–87. Perhaps, the most striking example of the potential mismatch between multiple attributes are the district capitals, some of which cannot be traced on the ground, see below.

The most amenable phase to this type of analysis is the time of the High Empire, when it is possible to combine a wide range of attributes, including settlement status, size, public buildings, coinage and the presence of foreign communities, typically Roman citizens.[15] Far less is known about these aspects in the Hellenistic-Roman phase, both because the historical testimonies are rare and because the majority of these towns were occupied continuously throughout the Roman period or were reoccupied in Late Antiquity, leaving behind few traces of earlier occupation. This could lead to an underestimate of the true complexity of the urban hierarchy, although there are good reasons to believe that, in this phase, the urban hierarchy was indeed shallower than during the High Empire.



Fig. 1. Map of the study area showing the terminal points of the Egnatian Road.

The Late Antique phase brings along a different set of problems. Although archaeologically it is perhaps the best studied of the three phases, the changed social circumstances reduce the number of attributes of potential relevance to the settlement hierarchy, blurring the differences between individual tiers. Whereas urban status can still be ascertained with the help of the written documents, the range of public buildings is much narrower than in the previous phase and this is accompanied by the disappearance of other useful indicators like autonomous coinage and inscriptions. At the same time, there was an evident upsurge in the number of hillfort settlements with urban characteristics, historical evidence for which is lacking.[16] In most parts of the study area, the systematic study of these settlements is yet to begin and this presents a serious obstacle to the full reconstruction of the urban map and especially the lower reaches of the urban hierarchy.

Assuming that the settlement tiers are positively correlated with the number of services provided to the surrounding population, we shall examine the distribution of individual tiers across the study-area and the spatial relations between the different settlement tiers.[17] Unweighted Thiessen polygons and

15 See for example Hobson 2020, 281–323.

16 Dunn 1994, 61–80; Mikulčić 2003.

17 E.g., Hodder – Hassal 1971, 391–407; Kunow 1988, 55–67.

buffers of variable size will be used to study the extent of urban coverage and the regularity in the distribution of services of various rank. This will help us identify an underlining structure in this distribution, if any, and relate it to one of the CPT principle schemes, market, transportation or administration.

It may be objected that the elaboration of the full settlement hierarchy is of a dubious relevance for the purposes of the present study. In theory, a simple market place, arguably a facility present even among low-ranking settlements, would have sufficient to supply the countryside with imported goods, including tableware.[18] However, it is generally agreed that tableware was rarely if ever an object of direct trade.[19] Transporting cargoes loaded exclusively with pottery over long distances would have been too expensive and risky, all the more so, because in most areas they could be substituted by local products. Most commonly, it would have been associated with other bulk goods and there are many reasons to think that these imports could only reach the base of the settlement hierarchy through the mediation of the high-ranking settlements. Once imported, fine-ware imports would have also spread in association with other goods and services, be it through internal trade or periodic visits to the high-ranking settlements by groups and individuals.[20] But irrespective of the likely mechanisms of distribution of pottery imports, the role of the urban markets in this process cannot be ignored.

A large proportion of the data for this study has already been collected and published. The urban geography and the urban hierarchy of Roman Macedonia were studied in great details in two recent studies, one covering the parts of the province that belong to modern Greece and the other those that fall in the neighbouring countries.[21] There, these and other methodological issues are discussed at great lengths. Quite usefully, both studies pay close attention to developments prior to the Roman conquest and offer lots of important data for the Hellenistic towns and *oppida*. Data for the Late Antique towns were collected independently by the author, and they mostly come from regional studies of Late Antique fortifications and historical sources, like Hierocle's list of *civitates* or the lists of bishops attending the ecumenical church councils.[22]

Distributions of tableware imports

The field of pottery studies in general is still relatively underdeveloped in the countries that cover the area of interest. This is especially true for the Roman period, for which there are only a handful of dedicated studies, most of which were published in the last couple of decades.[23] The published data is heavily biased towards the largest urban centres, which is not particularly helpful for the purposes of the present study. Therefore, in order to create the distribution maps for the different tableware categories, it was necessary to collect the data scattered in numerous excavation and survey reports and exhibition catalogues.[24] This is not only time-consuming, but it also carries risks of importing incorrect data. Typically, when it comes to the small finds, field reports are poorly

18 See the role of fairs in rural districts, De Ligt 1993.

19 For example, the connection between the export of African Red Slip and grain, Bonifay 2017, 327–351; for a review of the mechanism of *terra sigillata* distribution see, Bes 2015.

20 The role of cities in the distribution of Western *terra sigillata* products is discussed in Van Oyen 2015, 279–299.

21 Karambinis 2020, 440–481; Donev 2020.

22 Mikulčić 2003. Papazoglou offers a critical overview of the written evidence for Late Antiquity (Papazoglou 1988).

23 Stojanović-Anderson 1993; Malamidou 2005. The thesis on Roman pottery from central Macedonia by Garyfallopoulos 2024, is still under embargo.

24 Most of the data has been sourced from the following publications: Albania: Shehi 2015 and papers in the journals *Iliria* and *Candavia*; North Macedonia: Ončevska-Todorovska 2008; Stojanović-Anderson 1993, and papers in the journal *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica*, Greece: Malamidou 2005 and papers in the journal, *To arkhaioloyiko ergo stin Makedonia kai Thraki*.

illustrated and contain only brief comments. Making matters even worse is the frequent use of the term *terra sigillata* in a very broad sense and sometimes incorrectly. Because in the great majority of cases there is no way of verifying these data, the only precautionary measure available was to ignore all references to tableware finds that are not illustrated or explicitly related to recognized types and forms. This will probably lead to an underestimate of the spread of certain categories, but this is the better alternative to including findspots of locally produced, slipped or painted vases. On the other hand, it is unlikely that the reports would have failed to mention tableware imports had they been discovered.

Our goal is not to create an exhaustive database of findspots of ceramic imports, but to arrive at an approximation of their spread and frequency at different points in time. Needless to mention, quantitative studies are limited to a handful of deposits from the major urban centres, and it is only possible to look at presence/absence. But these distributions alone are not particularly telling, because they will primarily reflect site-distributions during periods in which the relevant tableware categories were used. A far more informative index is the proportion of sites per period which contain the tableware categories in question. To this end, in addition to the towns and town-like settlements, the findspots file includes around 100 surveyed or excavated sites of different categories and dated anywhere between the Early Hellenistic and Late Roman period. The variations in these proportions during the three phases of the period under study should provide a reliable measure of the extent to which ceramic imports were accessible in the study area.

This approach is not without problems, though they do not necessarily invalidate it. At this point, two are worth mentioning. The first is the uneven scope and intensity of fieldwork. The findspots file includes both large urban sites and necropolis that have been systematically excavated over many years and sites that have seen only brief rescue campaigns or surveys. The absence of particular categories of finds from the latter is obviously far from definite, and future research may well result in the discovery of such finds. Caution is highly-warranted in these cases, although it can be argued that the sample is large enough to absorb these uncertainties. There is no reason to believe that tableware imports were somehow systematically overlooked at a large number of sites.

The other issue pertains to the interpretation of the results and is potentially a source for a greater concern. Is the proposed index really a measure of the outreach of the markets in the study-area or does it simply reflect local cultural preferences? Is it not possible that the sparseness of certain categories of imported tableware was due to their low popularity or even conscious boycott? At least until an analogous study of a different category of imports, preferably non-ceramic, is carried out, this question will have to stay open.

Hellenistic – Roman, 167–30 BC

The urban geography

Recent studies of the urbanisation in the study-area during the Roman period have recognized a sharp decline in the number of towns and fortified settlements in the centuries following the Roman conquest.[25] Although there are subtle differences between the constituent parts of this area, the overall trend is undeniable. In Southern Illyria, the northern part of Epirus and Lower Macedonia both the number of towns and the total size of the urban area decreased. Preexisting settlements either shrank in size or were abandoned, and this loss was not compensated for by the few expanding or newly-founded towns.[26]

25 Karambinis 2020, Tab. 14.1; Donev 2020, Tab. 2.2–3.

26 Karambinis 2020, 453.

But this de-urbanisation was not a sudden disastrous event caused by the Roman conquest. In some parts of the study-area, like the core of the Macedonian kingdom and the Thermaic Gulf, there had been an ongoing process of centralisation ever since the Macedonian conquest in the middle of the 4th century BC. Certainly, the most striking episode was the founding of Thessaloniki with the synoecism of dozens of earlier settlements in the Thermaic Gulf.[27] The numerous prehistoric tell-settlements in the hinterland of Pella probably experienced a similar fate after the founding of the new capital.[28]

Nor did the Roman conquest of Illyria and Macedonia accelerate this process. Many settlements continued to exist for at least a century after the conquest, and some survived until the late 1st century AD.[29] Changes in the extent and topography of individual towns are difficult to track in the archaeological record, but the historical evidence does not hint at major changes in the urban hierarchy. Though the provincial seat may have moved to Thessaloniki, Pella, the former capital, continued to function as a district capital and was re-founded as a Roman colony towards the end of this period.[30] Most other district capitals had already been important centres prior to the conquest.

The towns in the integral study-area can be ordered into three hierarchical tiers (Tab. 1). The towns that belong to the top-tier are clearly set aside by their size, typically greater than 50 ha, political status and the presence of virtually all attributes of urbanity characteristic for that time-period. Pella is obviously much larger than the other first-tier towns, but this size-estimate refers to the pre-conquest period.[31] It can be reasonably assumed that it lost some of its former standing after the conquest, even though precise data is unavailable. In addition to the former Macedonian capital, the first-tier settlements include the Greek colonies and the other district capitals proclaimed by the Romans. The only possible exception is Pelagonia, the capital of the fourth district, which still has not been located and is therefore relegated to the second tier.[32]

Tab. 1. The attributes of the settlement tiers in the Hellenistic-Roman period.

Status	Size	Number of public buildings	Coinage	Rank
Colonia, district capital	> 50 ha	> 5	yes	1
Polis, tribal centre	10–30 ha	1–3	no	2
Oppidum, fort	< 10 ha	0–1	no	3

The second-tier consists of autonomous or semi-autonomous towns, with attested institutions, a few public buildings and a size-range between 10 and 30 ha. The autonomous status of many of these towns is confirmed in official documents, like the Delphi list of the Theorodochs.[33] The limits of this group are not as sharp as those of the first-tier settlements. In some cases, the historically attested status is not matched by the archaeological evidence, whereas in others, anonymous *oppida* exhibit traits that are defining of the second-tier towns. This is not necessarily the result of data fuzziness, for it also reflects the real dynamics in the lower tiers of the hierarchy.

27 Papazoglou 1988, 189–205.

28 Merousis 2004, 73–82; Chrysostomou 1990, 205–231.

29 Pella: Akamatis 2011, 393–408; Ossa: Adam-Veleni *et al.* 1992, 383–393; Petres: Veleni 1987, 9–24; in general, Adam-Veleni 2010, 170–183.

30 Chrysostomou – Chrysostomou 2011, 283–298.

31 Karambinis 2020, Tab. 14.2.

32 Papazoglou 1988, 276–292; Lilčić-Adams – Jakimovski 2016.

33 Plassart 1921, 1–85; Raynor 2016, 225–262.

The base of the settlement hierarchy includes the great majority of the known settlements. Typically, these are smaller than 10 ha and their only public buildings are their defences. This group possibly includes a number of non-urban sites, like military outposts or *refugia*, but it is worth pointing out that the few excavated examples not only show evidence of permanent occupation, but also traces of urban planning and crafts.[34] Conversely, at least some of these sites could be reassigned to the second tier in the light of new discoveries.

In the aftermath of the conquest, the entire study-area was densely populated with by third-tier settlements, which comprise nearly 90% of all urban or urban-like settlements at that time (Fig. 2). The average intercity distances are only about 11 km, but there are considerable variations and, as a result, urban coverage is partial. Although the Egnatian Road was constructed at the beginning of the period under consideration, there are no signs of alignment on this new axis. On the contrary, a closer look at the settlement distribution in different parts of the study-area will reveal clustering on a micro-regional level, even in the most remote areas. These discrete concentrations often coincide with separate geographic and political units, like the core area of ancient Macedon, Paeonia, Pelagonia, Dassaretia in the Ohrid Basin and the hinterland of Apollonia.

Unlike the settlements from the bottom of the settlement hierarchy, the few high-ranking towns are not distributed evenly. Both the first- and the second-tier settlements are almost exclusively found in the core area of the Macedonian Kingdom and in the hinterland of Apollonia on the Adriatic Coast. Outside these areas, it is difficult to identify high-ranking settlements without distorting the evidence. Potential candidates are Pelagonia the capital of the fourth district and Stobi (near Gradsko, North Macedonia), an *emporium* of the third district for the export of salt, but in neither case is this substantiated by the archaeological evidence.[35] But even if it is proven that these two centres belong to the second tier, still large segments of the study-area would not have had a direct access to high-ranking centres and services.

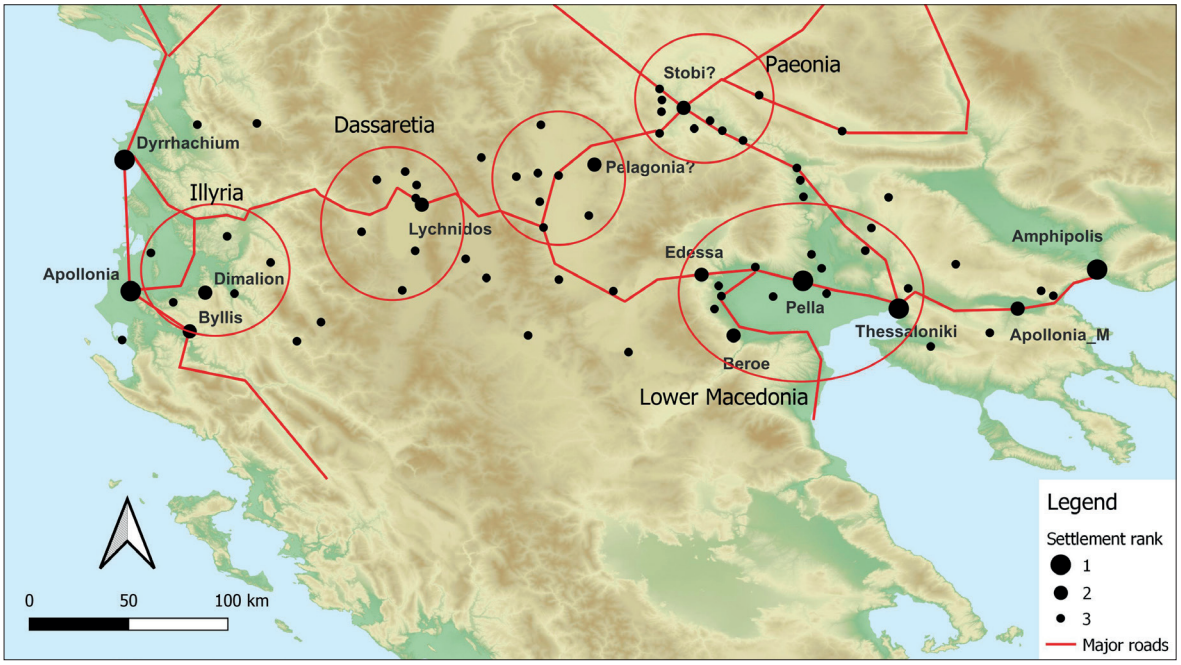


Fig. 2. Distribution of towns and hillforts during the Hellenistic-Roman phase.

34 Adam-Veleni 2010, 170–183.

35 Pelagonia: see Footnote 34; urban growth in Stobi did not pick up prior to Augustan times, see latest Blaževska – Pavlovski 2018, 12–46.

Only in the areas that gravitated towards the colonies on the Adriatic Coast and those brought under the control of the Macedonian kings from early on, is there evidence of regular distribution of the towns of equal rank. In the core area of the Macedonian Kingdom, first- and second-tier settlements appear consistently at every 40-50 km and they are already aligned on the Egnatian Road, which in Lower Macedonia followed closely the old east-west road from royal times (Fig. 3).[36] Two of the best-known CPT models predict that third-tier settlements are located halfway between two first- or second-ranking towns. This is indeed the case with Kyrrhos, located on the boundary of the service areas of Edessa and Pella or Arethousa, between Kalindoe and Amphipolis. However, these are the exceptions. In most of the cases, the third-ranking settlements are too close to the higher-ranking centres and appear just outside their market radii, indicated by the ten-km buffers. Occasionally, as in Pella or Byllis in Epirus, the service areas of the third-ranking settlements nest neatly within the 25-km buffers that delimit the service area for higher-order goods. This pattern is more attuned to the goals of administration or agricultural exploitation than market coverage, and it approximates the administrative variant of CPT.[37] Tributary settlements are pulled inside the service areas of first- and second-ranking towns, but they are confined to the outer rings to secure room for their own agricultural and market territories.

On the other hand, the top-ranking settlements, both in Illyria and in Lower Macedonia do not fit into this scheme (Fig. 4). They are all located on the edges of the system and, in some cases, are positioned too close to each other. Most of these towns were not the product of organic growth. They were either founded by outside colonists or by regional rulers and were grafted onto an existing

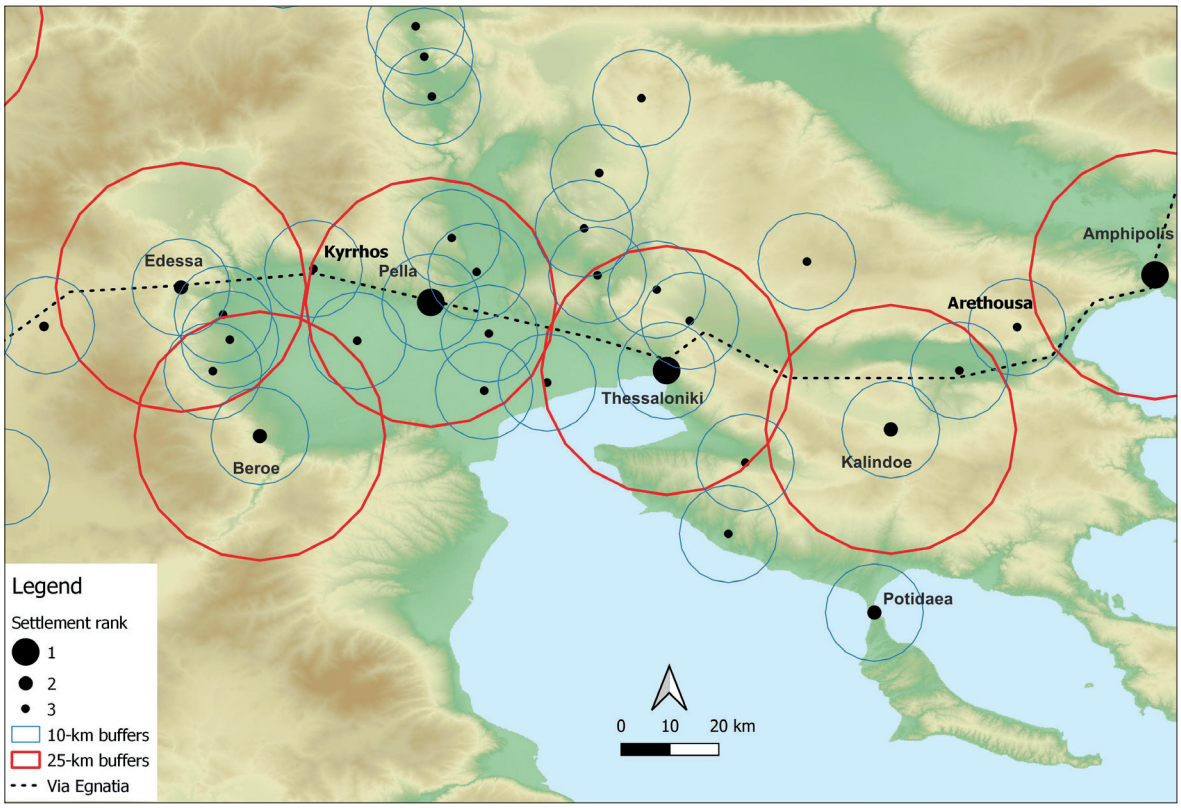


Fig. 3. Distribution of settlements ranked into distinct tiers in Lower Macedonia during the Hellenistic-Roman phase.

36 Gounaropoulou – Hatzopoulos 1985, 22–23.

37 Bekker-Nielsen 2020, 85–86. In market and transportation variants, lower-ranking centres stand halfway between neighbouring higher-ranking centres.

system. The full picture is also partly obscured by the static nature of the data. Prior to the conquest, Pella had stood at the centre of the system in the core area of the Macedonian kingdom, and halfway between the lower-ranking towns of Edessa (Greece) and Thessaloniki. But in the aftermath of the Roman conquest, the system entered a long phase of transition, during which the old royal capital and the new provincial capital of Thessaloniki existed side-by-side. Only in a later phase did the provincial capital take over Pella's former role.

During the first century and a half after the founding of the province, Macedonia did not have a unified urban system. It was an artificial and composite unit that encompassed areas with different developmental trajectories. The old political divisions are still visible on the urban map of the Roman province. Complex settlement hierarchy and signs of urban patterning are discernible only in the parts of the area that had a developed urban tradition prior to the conquest. Excluding the Macedonian segment of the road, which had been in place prior to the conquest, the impact of the Via Egnatia on the settlement distribution or the urban hierarchy in this early phase is imperceptible.

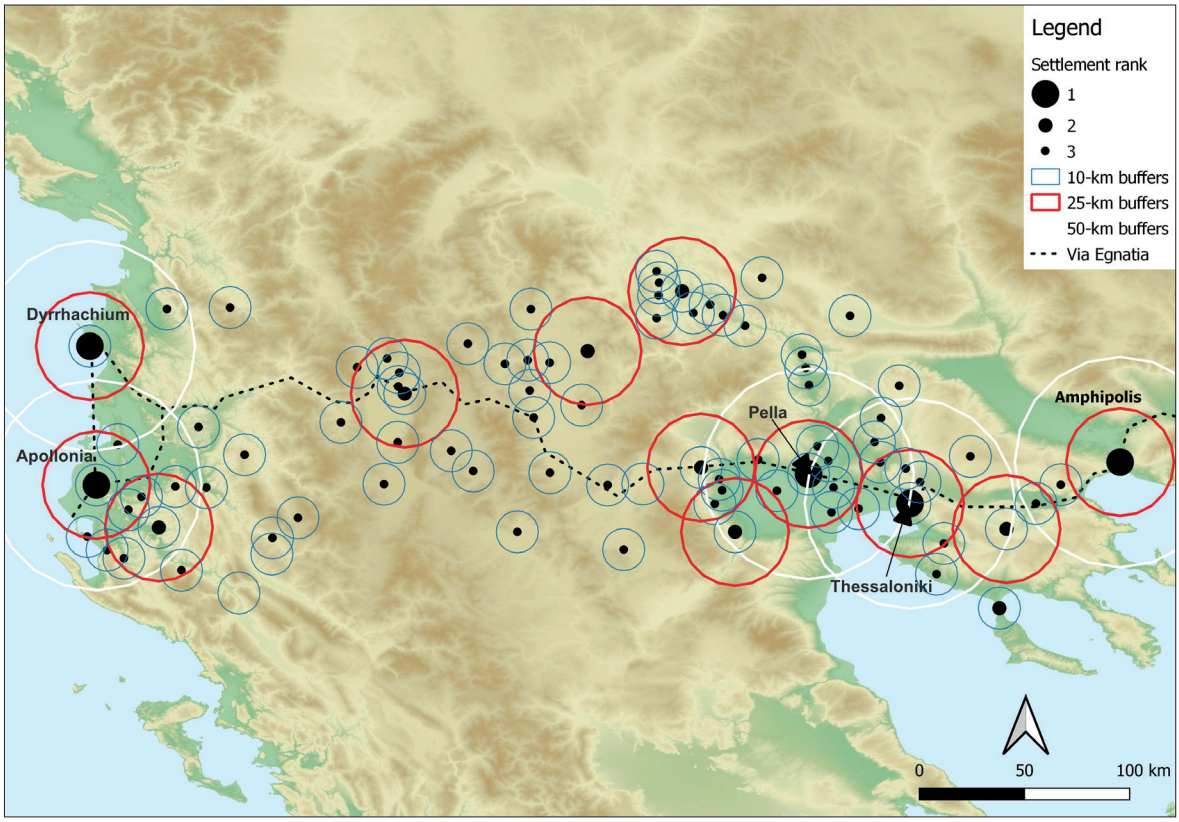


Fig. 4. Distribution of settlements ranked into distinct tiers in the study-area during the Hellenistic-Roman phase.

Distribution of Attic and Apulian Red-figure vases

From a chronological point of view, these categories of fine-ware are seemingly irrelevant for the period studied here, because their production had stopped by the early 3rd century BC.[38] Nonetheless, bearing in mind that the Hellenistic-Roman urban system had changed little since then, they are still potentially indicative of its coverage and connectivity. Additionally, local imitations of Red-figure vases were limited to a small number of production centres and it can be assumed

38 Apulian: Herring 2018; Attic: Moor 1997.

that most of the reported finds are actual imports.[39] On the other hand, there is evidence that the contemporary Hellenistic categories of tableware, the monochrome, Black-slip or painted vases and Megarian bowls were produced in a large number of local centres and these are often impossible to distinguish from imports without archaeometric analyses.[40]

Formally, most examples of Red-figure vases come from drinking sets and *lekythoi* and are found both in settlements and necropoleis. Quantities are by all standards low but, contrary to predictions, their degree of dispersal is surprisingly high (Fig. 5).[41] Except for the mountainous parts of Illyria and Upper Macedonia, finds of this category are present in nearly all corners of the study-area. This material has been found at 49 of the 63 sites with a documented Late Classical-Early Hellenistic phase or at three-quarters of the known sites. Most of the findspots coincide with the towns and their necropolis, and these include settlements from all tiers of the urban hierarchy. This tableware class is also present at rural sites, small open settlements and isolated burials.

The areas with the highest frequences of these finds are the hinterlands of Apollonia and Dyrrhachium and, expectedly, the core of the Macedonian kingdom. This may well be a reflection of the local history of research, but it is nonetheless symptomatic that these concentrations coincide with the

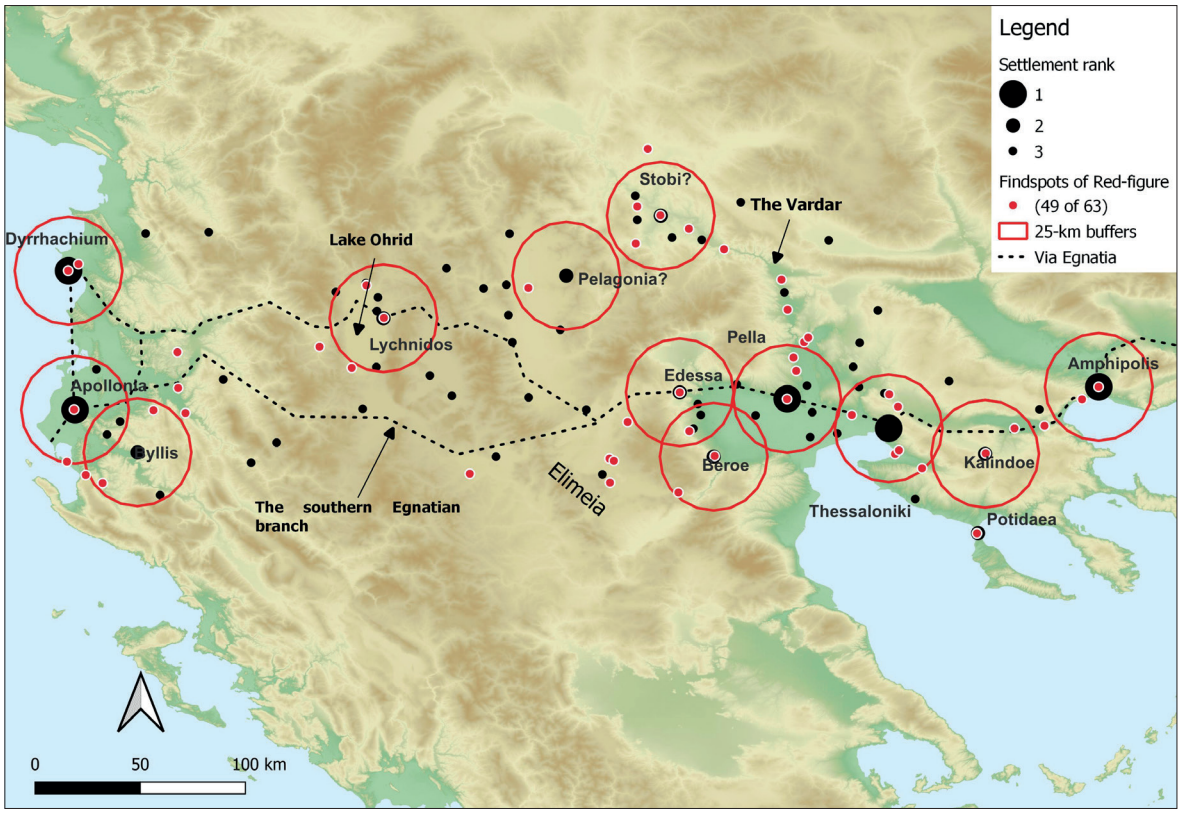


Fig. 5. Distribution of imported Red-figure vases in the study-area.

39 Products from the Pella workshop are mostly limited to the town and its environs, Akamatis 2014, 177–191. On the other hand, most of the material from the oppidum of Kale, Krševica in Serbia has been related to the Attic workshops, Vranić – Radojčić 2023, 221–233; and the same applies to the finds in North Macedonia, Sanev 2013, 3–55. Admittedly, as far is known, this has not been confirmed by archaeometry.

40 Evidence for local production of Megarian bowls at: Dyrrhachium (Shehi 2010, 55–59); Stobi (Stojanović-Anderson 1993) Vergina (Faklaris 1993, 61–68); Palatiano (Hadzipolichroni-Anagnostopoulou 1996, 189–204).

41 Some sites are exceptions, see Vranić – Radojčić 2023, 222, 225; Sanev 2013, 7.

areas that had direct access to first-order services and in which there was a tendency towards regular patterning of urban places. Note that most findspots fall within the 25-km buffers around second-tier towns. Although in small quantities, Red-figure imports have also reached inland areas, like the Middle Vardar Valley, the Ohrid Basin and Elimeia, in which second-tier towns were few and far between, whereas first-tier towns were absent. Even here, they are not limited to the urban centres but are also found at rural sites and necropolis.

It is also worth observing that, from a global perspective, a large number of findspots align on two axes. One extends parallel to and to the south of the Egnatian Road and the other coincides with the Vardar Valley. Both axes were natural corridors used ever since prehistoric times. The former is the so-called southern branch of the Via Egnatia, back then, of a far greater importance than the route later favoured by the Romans, and the latter is the road along the Vardar River, which cut across Lower Macedonia and continued south into Thessaly.[42] Even so, these findspots are not pinned on a linear axis, but are scattered across the areas that border on these corridors.

There is a sharp divide between the western half of the area dominated by Apulian products and the eastern half, where most of the imports came from Attica. The former would have been supplied through Dyrrhachium and Apollonia, the latter through Pella and Thessaloniki. Thus, the spheres of economic interaction coincided with discrete areas of political control and influence. Although natural corridors had connected the Adriatic and Aegean Coast long before the arrival of Rome, regional fragmentation dictated by local historical developments and geography prevailed over integrative processes. Of course, this reflects the situation in the Early Hellenistic period, but the divide between the Illyrian or Candavian segment of the road, oriented towards the western Peloponnese and Italy, and the Macedonian segment looking towards the Aegean and further east would have been still visible in the first couple of centuries after the Roman conquest.

But even though the urban geography along the Egnatian Road is not suggestive of a highly integrated system, imported goods still reached relatively remote inland areas, like Elimeia or Pelagonia. The diffuse spread of wealth and urbanity was matched by the flow of goods that were introduced into this area from the first-tier settlements on the coast, hundreds of kilometres away from the interior. The actual mechanisms of distribution remain unknown, but in many parts of the study-area they appear to be largely independent of the existence of a state-sponsored infrastructure or mature urban networks.

The High Empire, 30 BC–300 AD

The urban geography

The process of the gradual de-urbanisation of the study-area observed in earlier studies had probably come to an end by the time of the Julio–Claudian dynasty. As a result, the number of towns was reduced by 20–30% in Macedonia and Paeonia, and by a staggering two-thirds in parts of Epirus and southern Illyria.[43] This decline did not affect all settlement tiers equally. With the striking exception of Pella, most of the settlements that were already large and prosperous in the previous phase retained their former status and standing. Most affected by this process were the settlements from the base of the settlement hierarchy, in particular those located in remote, mountainous areas. Their share in the urban network dropped from nearly 90% in the Hellenistic-Roman period to about 65% during the High Empire. The causes of this transformation continue to baffle researchers. Hypothetically,

42 The southern branch of the Egnatian Road, following the River Devol, was also the more important one during the Middle Age (Fasolo 2008, 134–135); for the Vardar Road see Mikulčić 2003, 33–36 and Fasolo – Lilčić-Adams 2025. This road followed a different route prior to the Roman conquest (Hatzopoulos – Loukopoulou 1989).

43 Karambinis 2020, 442–443; Donev 2020, Tab. 2.2.

it has been brought in connection with the fact that the study area was the main theatre of the civil wars that marked the end of the Republic.[44] This is neither very convincing nor is it borne out by the archaeological evidence from individual towns, which does not point to a synchronous destruction and abandonment.[45] Whatever the particular causes, the transformation of the urban network would have been a gradual and non-violent process, even if the results were no less dramatic.

In contrast to this, the hierarchical structure of the network had evolved gradually from the previous phase (Tab. 2). There is a clear trend towards centralisation and further crystallization of the differences between individual settlement tiers. The first tier became narrower than in the preceding phase. Thessaloniki, the provincial capital, which had doubled in size by the time of the High Empire, together with the Greek colonies of Dyrrhachium and Apollonia stood on the top of the pyramid. In all three cases, settlement size came close to or exceeded the 100-ha threshold, and the number of known public buildings is greater than five. Their juridical status differed, but significant Roman presence is attested only in Dyrrhachium and Thessaloniki. Note that towards the end of this phase, Apollonia was already in decline and possibly joined the second-tier settlements.[46]

Tab. 2. The attributes of the settlement tiers during the High Empire.

Status	Size	Number of public buildings	Roman communities	Coinage	Rank
Capital, Roman colony	> 100 ha	> 5	yes	yes	1
Roman colony, koinon seat, municipium	20–50 ha	3–5	yes, no	yes, no	2
Poleis, capitals of rural districts	< 20 ha	< 3	no	no	3
Road-stations, special purpose settlements	< 10 ha	0–1	no	no	4

Towns that belong to the second tier usually measure between 20 and 50 ha and the number of public buildings varies between three and five. The latter is to a large degree determined by the location of the sites and the history of research, so these aspects have to be born in mind. The small number of public buildings in Edessa is likely predetermined by the continuity of occupation until the modern period, whereas Apollonia in Mygdonia is poorly researched.[47] Nearly all second-tier towns were either colonies or *municipia* or had organized communities of Roman citizens. Beroe (Verria, Greece) had none, but this town was the seat of the provincial *koinon*.[48] In all of these cases, the elevated juridical status or an added political function was matched by a greater number of public buildings and size. Possible exceptions are Pella (Pella, Greece) and Cassandrea (Kassandreia, Greece), two colonies which, in view of their status and size-estimates, should have joined the second-tier, but which have so far produced very little archaeological evidence of their urbanity.[49] Both have been tentatively assigned to the third settlement tier.

44 Nigdelis 2007, 51–87.

45 See previous section.

46 Dimo *et al.* 2007.

47 Edessa: Chrysostomou 2014; Apollonia in Mygdonia: Adam-Veleni 2000, 273–290.

48 Tataki 1988.

49 Pella: Chrysostomou – Chrysostomou 2011, 283–298; a Roman *domus* from Kassandrea: Misalidou-Despotidou – Germenis 2008, 411–418; for variable developments of the towns in Roman Macedonia see, Evangelidis 2022.

The rest of the autonomous towns and *civitates* comprise the third settlement tier. Here, it is necessary to distinguish between two sub-groups. The first consists of autonomous towns, the sites of which have been securely identified. Their size does not exceed 20 ha and they typically have only a few public buildings, some of which had been constructed prior to the Roman conquest. The second group are the centres of *civitates* or local *koine*, known from the historical sources, but which still have not been located. These are collected in a separate file and their location on the map is approximate. It is possible that future research will result in their discovery, but it is equally possible that many were the nominal centres of autonomous rural districts, often attested in Upper Macedonia.[50] Because it is unclear if these were literally towns, they are shown as a separate category on the map. If these were really only the nominal centres of rural *koine*, it is questionable if they could supply their territories with imported market goods. Yet, even rural districts must have been served by local markets, and, for a lack of a better solution, the rural district capitals can be seen as their proxies.

The last settlement tier consists of secondary or subordinate settlements and road-stations, often newly-founded. The former are always smaller than 10 ha, they have no known historical identity and lack public buildings. The few road-stations that have been identified on the ground and studied do not differ from the other subordinate settlements in these respects, and it is safe to assume the same for the rest of the road-stations.[51] Only the road-stations mentioned in the Antonine Itinerary and the Peutinger Table are included. The Bordeaux itinerary, which lists many more stations than these two sources, reflects the situation in a later period.[52]

Only in the period of the High Empire does the impact of the Via Egnatia on the regional urban map come into full sight (Fig. 6). Over one-third of the archaeologically attested autonomous towns, here ranked in the third settlement tier or higher, were located on this road. These include half of the second-tier towns and all three top-ranking towns. On the other hand, the great majority of the small pre-Roman centres which helped spread Classical urbanism in the most remote inland areas were either in decline or ceased to exist. Even the towns located within a short distance from the Egnatian Road, some of which were ranked in the second settlement tier in the previous phase, show very little evidence of construction. Notable examples include Dimale (Krotinë, Albania), an important Illyrian centre, located only 10 to 15 km west of the supposed route of the Egnatian Road, or Kyrrhos (near Aravissos, Greece) in Lower Macedonia, replaced by the newly founded road-station of Scurio, founded only a few kilometres to the south.[53] Similar developments can be observed in other parts of the study-area and in Aegean Thrace.[54] Settlements that were bypassed by the Egnatian Road, either disappear from the written sources or do not show evidence of a continued urban life, even if they are located at short distances from the road. The remaining prosperous towns, which did not lie on the Egnatian road, belonged to other major corridors, like the Vardar Road or the coastal road to Thessaly and Greece. Thus, the urban geography of Roman Macedonia was trending towards the urban corridor model, attested in provinces with a very different history of urbanisation.[55]

Of itself, a location on the Egnatian corridor did not always guarantee prosperity. Pella, the former capital re-founded as a colony is the most striking case in point. Nearly all other first- and second-tier towns happen to be located near the exits of discrete micro-regions, at the meeting points

50 Hatzopoulos 1996; Papazoglou 1988, 159–169.

51 Ad Quintum: Ceka 1976, 287–312; Scurio: Adam-Veleni 1998, 1–16.

52 For a full discussion of these sources, see Fasolo 2008, 63–74.

53 Dimale: Fenn *et al.* 2010; Kyrrhos: Papazoglou 1988, 152–153.

54 Karambinis 2020, 449; for a more moderate view see, Evangelidis 2021, 503–516.

55 Donev 2024, 34–35.

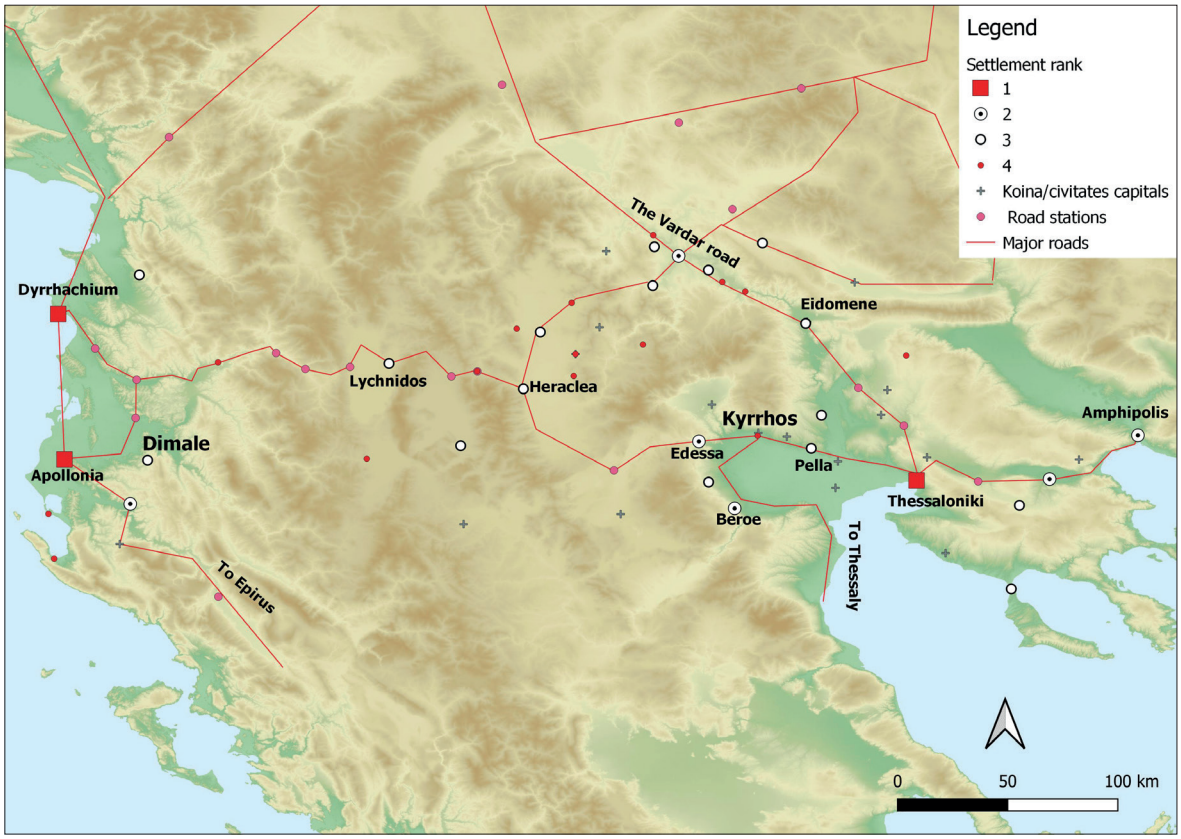


Fig. 6. Distribution of settlements ranked into distinct tiers in the study-area during the High Empire.

of two different geographies. All first-ranking towns stood on the coastline, whereas towns like Edessa, or Heraclea Lyncestis were located near the entries into defiles or at the foot of mountain passes. The same principle applies to the towns located on other corridors like Beroe and Eidomene (near Marvintsi, North Macedonia). This is more than a sheer curiosity because, from the point of view of transportation, this type of location marked changes in the mode of traffic. This is where goods were loaded and unloaded from ships, carts or pack animals. Thanks to this role in the traffic and urban network, these towns certainly had the potential to grow into points from which imports were exchanged for the surplus of the surrounding areas.

Overall, the system does not appear any more unified than in the preceding phase. The great imbalance between the western and the eastern half of the Via Egnatia persists, with over half of the high-ranking towns located on the Macedonian segment of the road. In fact, the only urban settlements in the Candavian or Illyrian segment are the Greek colonies of Dyrrhachium and Apollonia, the starting points of the road. The next autonomous town, Lychnidos (Ohrid, North Macedonia), lies over 150 km away from the coast. It is not by chance that this long-section passing through marshes and high mountains is serviced exclusively by fourth-tier settlements or road-stations. The ancient itineraries mention no less than seven or eight stations on the leg between Apollonia/Dyrrhachium and Lychnidos, as opposed to only a few in the more urbanised Macedonian leg of the road.[56]

Entering the core area of ancient Macedon, the 50-km module observed in the previous phase returns (Fig. 7). This is the most urbanised segment of the road between Edessa and Amphipolis, with second-tier settlements appearing at every 40–50 km and with the capital at the centre of the segment. Contrary to the predictions of the classical CPT models, lower ranking towns and settlements rarely appear near the edge of the service areas of the high-ranking towns. A few examples include

56 Fasolo 2008, 63–67; Gounaropoulou – Hatzopoulos 1985.

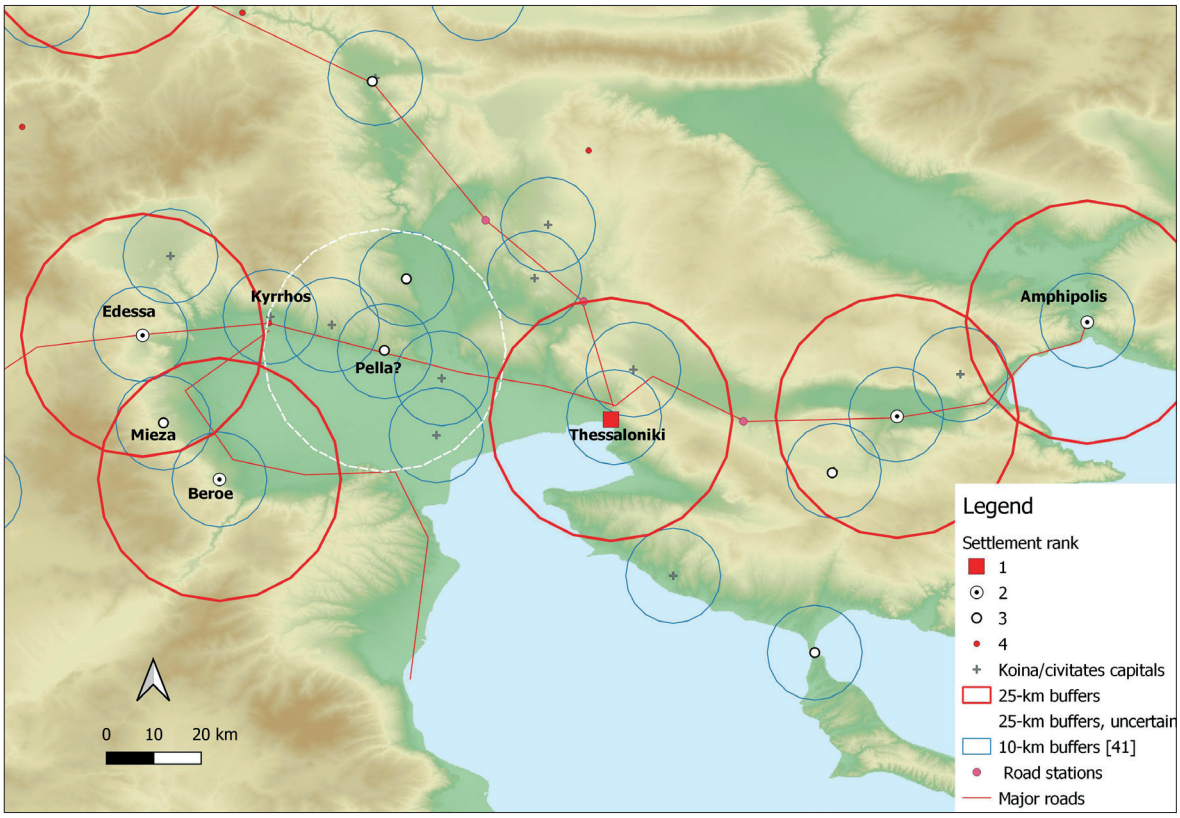


Fig. 7. Distribution of settlements ranked into distinct tiers in Lower Macedonia during the High Empire.

Kyrrhos or Scurrio, between Edessa and Pella, and Mieza (near Naousa, Greece) between Beroe and Edessa, both third-tier towns, and these were mentioned in the previous section. This tendency is slightly more visible along the western segment of the Egnatian Road, with fourth-tier settlements or road-stations appearing halfway between two autonomous towns, conforming to the transportation principle of CPT. Examples include Scampsa between Lychnidos and Dyrrhachium or Cellae between Edessa and Heraclea Lyncestis (near Bitola, North Macedonia) (Fig. 8). Some of these places will eventually achieve a higher rank, but not before Late Antiquity. Elsewhere in Lower Macedonia, in the Middle Vardar Valley and in the hinterland of Apollonia, the low-ranking towns and settlements are arranged in accordance with the administrative principle of CPT, observed in the previous phase. Note that in the most densely urbanised segments of the area, third-ranking towns behave like tributary settlements, even if their autonomous status is historically confirmed, whereas in the peripheral segments, in which this pattern is distorted by the physical geography, third-tier towns stand at the centres of tributary areas equivalent to those of the second-tier towns in the densely urbanised sectors.

During the period of the High Empire, the urban network in the study-area was chiefly confined to the major road-arteries. Ancient towns, even if located only a few km from these roads lost their importance and many were likely deserted. The dense modular urban geography of the previous phase was replaced by a linear system of roads and towns, leaving large swaths of land without any recognisable urban centres.

Distribution of Italian and Eastern *terra sigillata*

Two broad categories of imported tableware started to dominate the market in the study-area towards the end of the preceding phase. These are the Italian *terra sigillata* from the Arretine or Pisan workshops

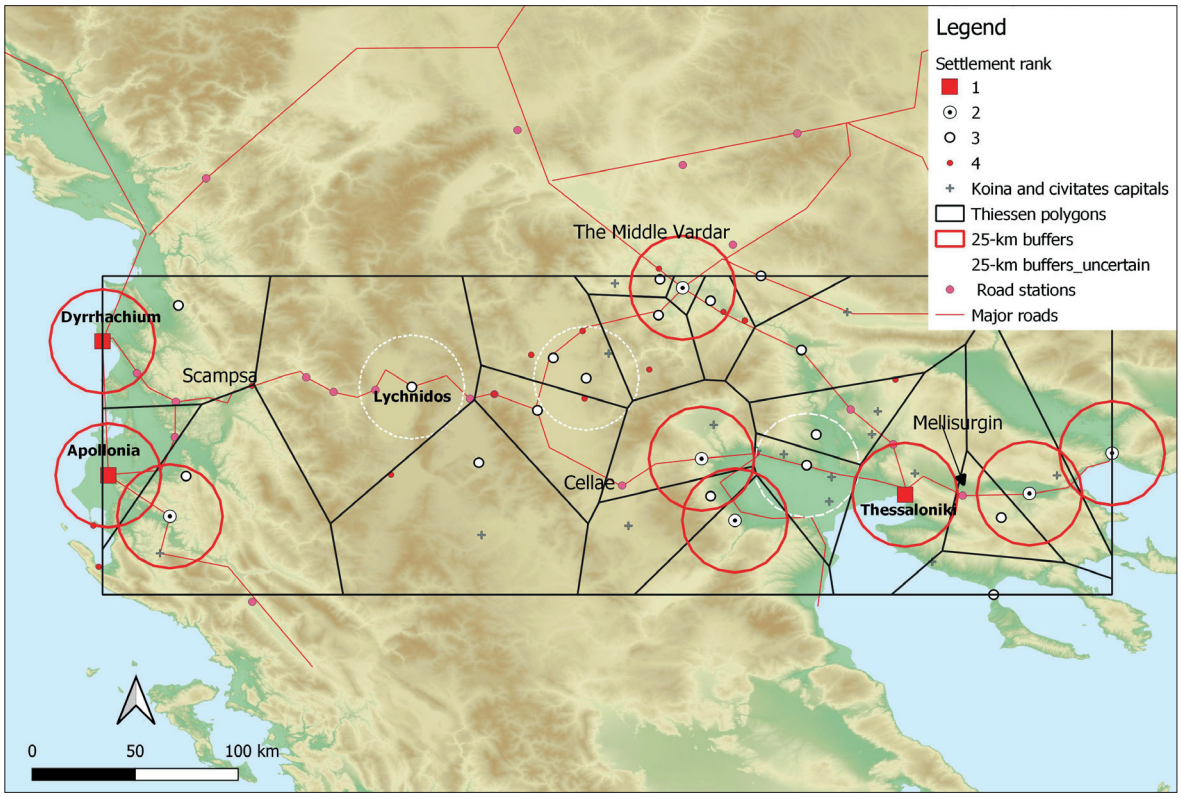


Fig. 8. Distribution of settlements ranked into distinct tiers in the study-area during the High Empire, with Thiessen polygons around high-ranking towns.

and the Eastern *terra sigillata*, mostly ESB and ESC, produced in Asia Minor.[57] Other *terra sigillata* categories, like Pontic or Western *terra sigillata* are rare and they always shadow the distribution of the prevalent classes.[58] Because Italian *terra sigillata* was not produced during the entire period under consideration, both categories are best looked at separately and jointly. In view of the quality of the published data, it is not always possible to make finer distinctions within these two broad categories. Potentially interesting details will thus be likely lost from sight, but the available data will serve the purposes of this paper.

Admittedly, there is some confusion and inconsistencies in the use of the term *terra sigillata* in the relevant literature, but these are more likely associated with the Late Roman period than with the period of the High Empire.[59] The likely source of this confusion is a category of Red Slip pottery, plain or stamped with simple geometric motifs, which was produced locally or in an unknown regional centre and became quite popular during the 3rd and 4th century AD.[60] Better executed or better-preserved examples can easily be mistaken for *terra sigillata* vases by non-experts. Luckily, studies of closed deposits by pottery specialists have demonstrated that, during the High Empire, the favourite local tableware was not covered with a uniform slip, but painted, often partially and not necessarily red.[61] Local *terra sigillata* imitations are rare and of visibly inferior quality to the imports.[62]

57 Bes 2015, 11–24.

58 Shehi 2015, 178–179; Stojanović-Anderson 1993, 54; this material is better represented at coastal sites, Malamidou 2005.

59 On the use of the term *pseudo-terra sigillata*, especially in Albanian archaeology, see Shehi 2015, 19–22.

60 Sokolovska 1976, 157–167.

61 Stojanović-Anderson 1993, 99–124.

62 The rare case of Palatiano, Hadzipolichroni-Agonostopoulou 1994, 263–268, Fig. 6.

Looking at the joint distribution of Italian and Eastern *terra sigillata*, it is apparent that its area of dispersal is much narrower than that of the Red-figure imports from the preceding phase (Fig. 9). This is not a simple effect of the reduced number of towns and sites dated to this period in general. Of the 90 sites with evidence of occupation during the High Empire, 39 include one of the two categories of *terra sigillata* imports and only 23 sites include both categories. Recall that imported Red-figure vases were encountered at three-quarters of the sites dated to the preceding phase. The true percentage for the *terra sigillata* imports is probably even lower, because many of the early *terra sigillata* findspots belong to the previous phase. Sites like Dimale, Antipatrea (Berat, Albania), the major Illyrian centre at Selce (near Pogradec, Albania) and others, were likely abandoned during the High Empire. In other words, these sites were supplied with *terra sigillata* imports through the earlier, Hellenistic network of roads and markets and the presence of these finds there only serves to underline the connectivity of the previous system. In reality, *terra sigillata* imports appear at about 30% of the sites dated to period of the High Empire.

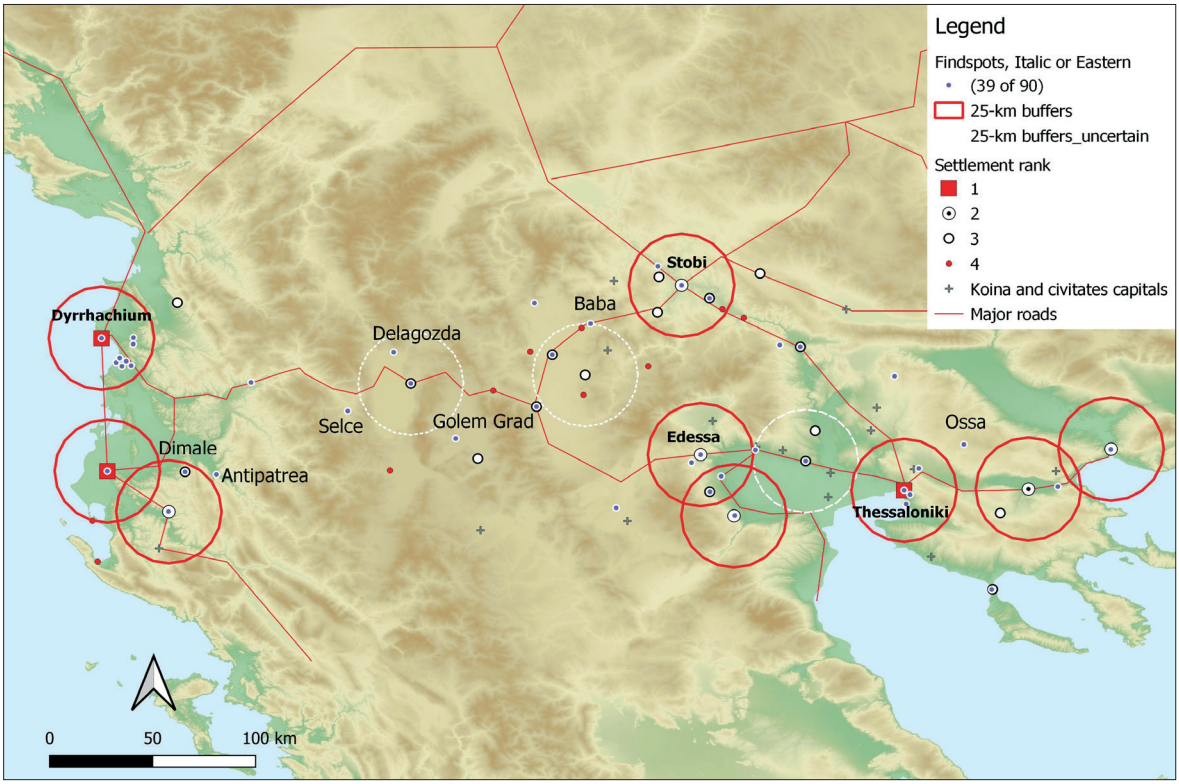


Fig. 9. Joint distribution of Italian and Eastern *terra sigillata*.

There is a striking difference between the distribution of Republican and Imperial *terra sigillata*. With the exception of the *villae* in the hinterlands of Thessaloniki and Dyrrhachium, nearly all findspots located off the major roads are pre-Augustan and include rare examples of early Arretine *terra sigillata* or ESA.[63] These are either Hellenistic towns and *oppida* which survived until the Augustan period or military bases from the Republican period. The rest of the findspots are found exclusively along the main roads and, for the greater part coincide with the known urban settlements. Virtually all tiers of the urban hierarchy are represented, especially among the towns on the Egnatian Road. Quantities likely varied with rank, but *terra sigillata* imports have been found in towns of all ranks, including road-stations and roadside settlements. The rare instances in which this material is absent from the towns located on major roads probably reflect the small amount of field research done, as is surely the case with Mygdonian Apollonia.

63 Atanasovski 2019, 263–284; Shehi 2015, 57–63; Nikolova 2011, 263–274.

Although its presence has been attested in all settlement tiers along the main roads, *terra sigillata* imports were primarily an urban phenomenon.[64] The distribution of *terra sigillata* findspots essentially mirrors the distribution of towns. This material is by and large absent from the ceramic assemblages collected during intensive surveys of rural areas in the Vardar Valley.[65] This should not come as a surprise knowing that even in Stobi, arguably the most important centre in the Vardar Valley in Roman Antiquity, *terra sigillata* imports comprise only between 10 and 15% of all tableware discovered at this site.[66] One jarring exception are the small concentrations of findspots in the environs of major towns, but these only reinforce the general impression. As mentioned, these are villa sites attached to the top-ranking towns of Dyrrhachium and Thessaloniki, and even these are positioned conspicuously close to the Egnatian Road.[67] In the absence of quantitative data, they highlight the centres in which *terra sigillata* imports would have been most readily available. Interestingly, none of the findspots coincide with the lower-ranking towns located within the tributary areas of the major towns on the Egnatian Road.

In contrast to the previous phase, there are no major differences between the distributions of the Italian and Eastern *terra sigillata* imports (Figs 10–11). Previous studies have demonstrated that the presence of Italian *terra sigillata* in particular, is always closely associated with the presence of large communities of Italian settlers.[68] Unlike the Apulian Red-figure vases or other early Italian products, it is found along the entire length of the Egnatian Road, including all colonies, *municipia* and poleis with organised communities of Roman citizens. Apparently, commercial or private contacts overruled geographic factors. This is most bluntly illustrated in the case of Philippi, in which Italian *terra sigillata* is the predominant category of tableware, whereas in the old Greek colonies located a short distance away on the Thracian coast, it is hardly represented.[69] Similarly, until the 2nd century AD, Italian tableware was the best represented category in Stobi, the only *oppidum civium Romanorum* in this area, in spite of the availability of Eastern *terra sigillata* imports in Thessaloniki.[70]

The same applies to the Eastern *terra sigillata*. The findspots of this category of finds are spread evenly along the Egnatian Road. Quantitative analyses will likely reveal important variations, but findspots with Eastern *terra sigillata* imports are equally represented in the hinterlands of Dyrrhachium and Thessaloniki. This is not a simple effect of the Eastern *terra sigillata* products taking over the market after the end of supra-regional production in Italy. This material was present in the western part of the study-area from the beginning of this phase.

The changed urban geography of the study-area in the period of the High Empire is echoed in the distribution of the principal categories of tableware imports. These are almost entirely limited to the main urban centres, which were invariably located on the Via Egnatia and the other roads of major importance. The small number of exceptions are either remnants of the earlier network of roads and markets or villa sites in the territories of the top-ranking towns, which can be seen as a mere extension of the urban lifestyle and consumption practices. It is beyond doubt that the Via Egnatia brought the Ionian and Aegean coasts closer than ever in the past. By the time of the High Empire, the ancient divide between the western and the eastern halves of the study-area had vanished. Goods and people travelled unimpeded along the entire length of this corridor but, in stark contrast to the preceding phase, they rarely dispersed into the areas.

64 See Van Oyen 2015, 289.

65 Donev 2015.

66 Stojanović-Anderson 1993, Fig. 5.2.

67 Forsén *et al.* 2019, 301–317; Adam-Veleni *et al.* 2003.

68 Stojanović-Anderson 1993, 188.

69 Abadie-Reynal *et al.* 2024, 369–384.

70 Stojanović-Anderson 1993, 189.

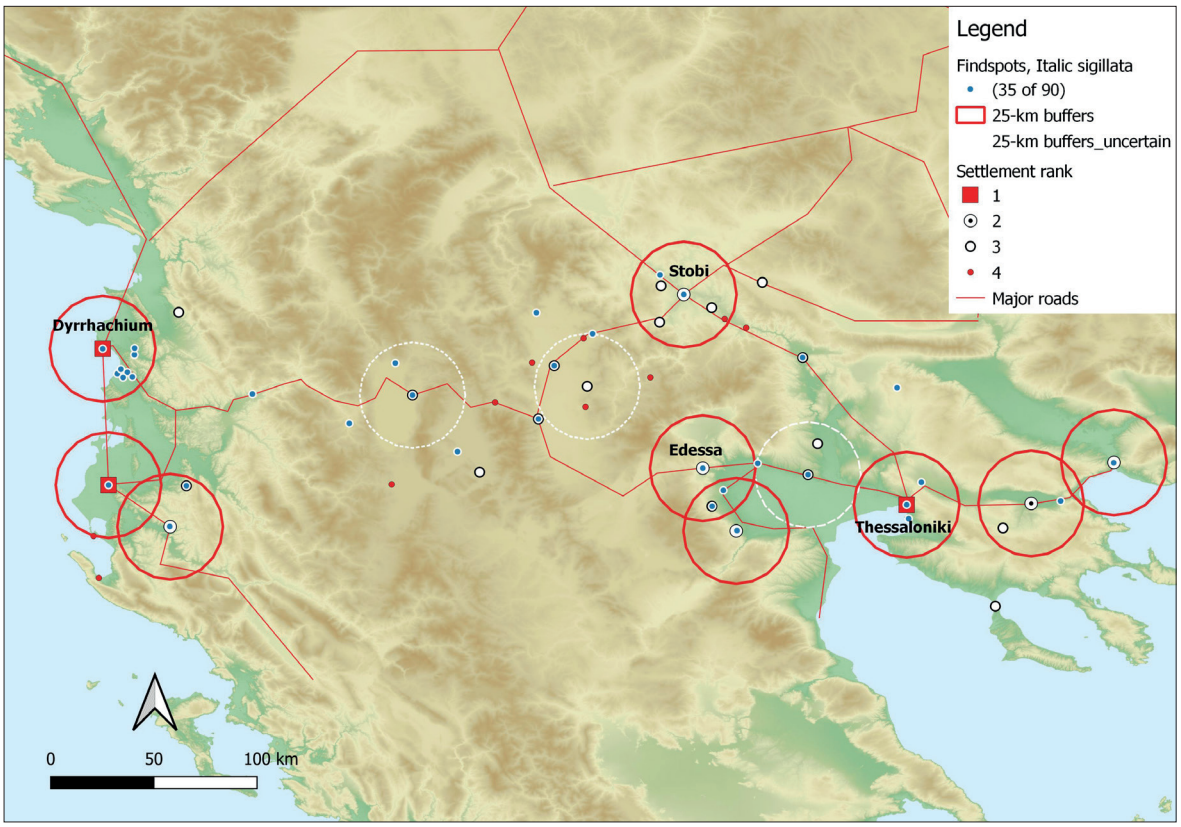


Fig. 10. Distribution of Italian *terra sigillata*.

Late Antiquity, 300–600 AD

The urban geography

Although not as abundant as in the preceding phase, the combined archaeological and historical sources do allow us to look into the hierarchical structure of the urban system in Late Antiquity. In addition to settlement-size and the presence of public buildings, the small corpus of historical documents reveals the formal status of the settlements and their place in the ecclesiastic hierarchy. The principle sources are the Synecdemos of Hierocles, a survey of towns by provinces, based on official documents from the late 5th century AD and the lists of bishops attending the ecumenical church councils.[71] Contrary to the view held by some scholars, these two lists do not coincide.[72] Only a fraction of the *civitates* included in the Synecdemos of Hierocles are confirmed as bishoprics prior to the 7th century AD. Occasionally, single bishops are signed as representatives of two or more *civitates*.[73] Notwithstanding the possibility that these documents are not exhaustive, it seems that only the largest and most important *civitates* became episcopal sees. This is corroborated by the distribution of the other relevant attributes, like settlement-size or the presence of public buildings (Tab. 3). Only two of the confirmed bishoprics fall within the size-range characteristic of the *civitates* that did not achieve this status in Late Antiquity, and even they stand out by the number of public buildings. The rest of the episcopal sees are both larger and boast a greater number of public buildings than the 'ordinary' *civitates*.

71 Honigmann 1943, 20–80; Burckhardt 1893.

72 Papazoglou 1988, 25–26.

73 Apollonia and Byllis in Illyria, Dimo *et al.* 2007, 55.

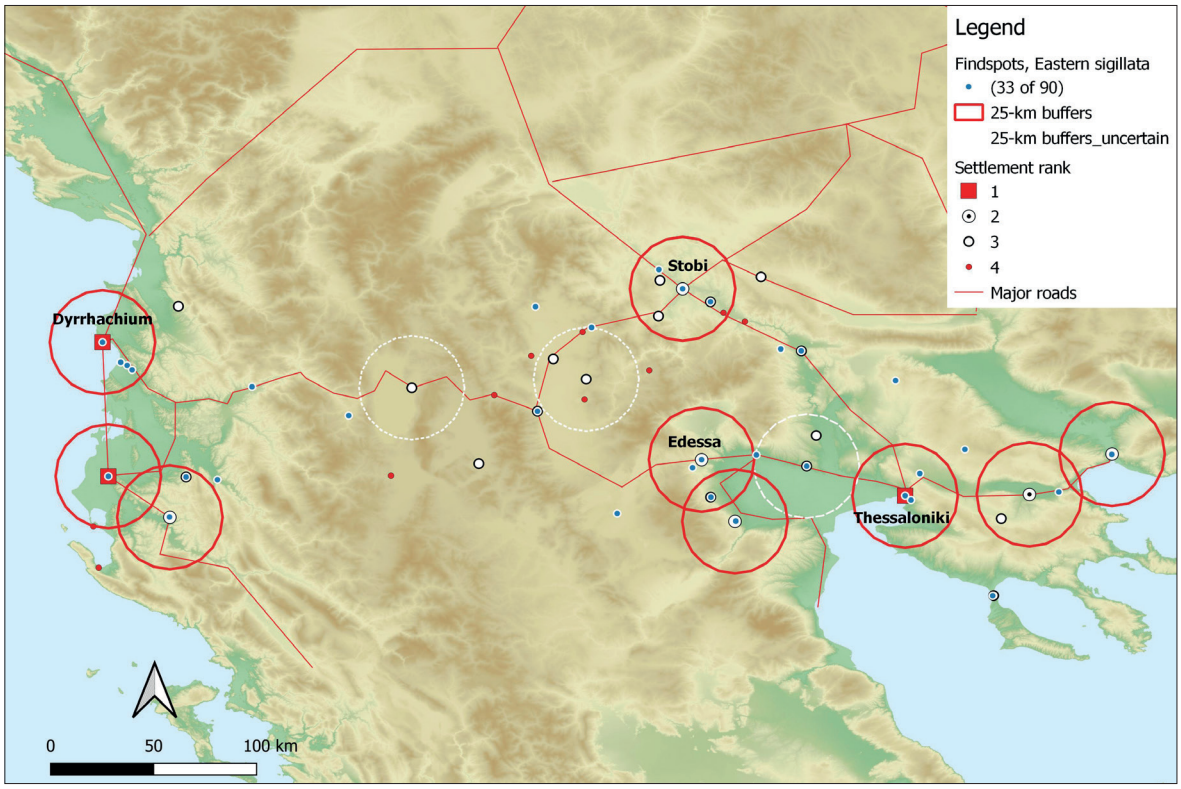


Fig. 11. Distribution of Eastern *terra sigillata*.

Tab. 3. The attributes of the settlement tiers during Late Antiquity.

Status	Size	Number of basilicas	Public buildings	Rank
Capital, metropolis	> 100 ha	> 5	yes	1
Episcopal see	10–50 ha	2–5	yes, no	2
Civitas capital	10–20 ha	0–2	no	3
Road stations, hillforts	< 10 ha	0–1	no	4

If this reasoning is correct, it is possible to distinguish four tiers in the urban hierarchy of the study-area in Late Antiquity. The two metropoleis and provincial capitals, Thessaloniki and Dyrrhachium stood on top of the pyramid. Dyrrhachium became the capital of the newly-formed province of Epirus Nova, a formal acknowledgment of its continued importance since the time before the conquest.[74] Apollonia, on the other hand, lost its place among the top-ranking settlements. In the Bordeaux itinerary, it is replaced by the port-town of Aulon as the *caput viae* on the Egnatian Road.[75]

The group of second-tier settlements consist of the episcopal sees, which mostly fell in the size-range between 20 and 40 ha and possess a number of public buildings. Apart from Early Christian basilicas, these include luxurious residences and baths. Their importance in the regional urban system is further underlined by the frequent references in the written sources. In contrast, we hear much less of the third-tier settlements, which coincide with Hierocles' *civitates*. In fact, a number of these towns are never mentioned outside Hierocle's list. Most of the third-tier settlements which

74 Cabanes – Drini 1995.

75 Fasolo 2008, 68–69.

have been identified archaeologically measure between 10 and 20 ha and have only one or two public buildings, typically Early Christian basilicas. Thus, from a purely archaeological point of view, they are not always easy to distinguish from the fourth-tier settlements.

Unsurprisingly, the bottom-tier is the most problematic category, both conceptually and empirically. The great majority of these sites are hillforts, known only thanks to the remains of their defensive walls. Their true character and role are still debated in the scholarly literature, but it is likely that this formal category unites both permanent settlements and various special-purpose sites, like military outposts, mining camps or *refugia*.[76] Changes in function over time or multiple functions at the same time are equally likely. The only certainty is that they were all either newly-founded or occupied the sites of pre-Roman *oppida*, which had been abandoned in the preceding phase. With rare exceptions, their names are unknown and they fall short of the 10-ha threshold. However, a number of these sites do have Early Christian basilicas, residential buildings and storage facilities, and the energy spent in the construction of their defensive walls suggests that these were not local *refugia* or mere fortified villages.[77]

The other problem with this category of settlements is the uneven amount of data for the region under study. The decades-long program of topographic recording of ancient and medieval forts in North Macedonia has brought to light close to 500 sites of this category with a Late Roman phase.[78] The resulting contrast with the nearly empty areas in most of Lower Macedonia and Illyria is staggering. A recent regional survey of hilltop settlements in the Korçe Basin in Albania has bluntly demonstrated that these variations merely reflect the variable intensity of research.[79] It is therefore advisable to disregard the data from the intensively studied areas. Only a segment of this dataset is shown here, as an illustration of the true density of these sites.

The road-stations listed in the Bordeaux itinerary are added as a separate sub-group to the fourth-tier settlements. The few studied examples fall in the same size-range as the hillforts, but by virtue of their locations, they would have played a different role in channelling the flow of goods and people.[80]

The unsettled conditions that prevailed during most of this phase do not show in the urban map of the study-area (Fig. 12). Doubtless, individual towns were destroyed and deserted, and many shrank in size, but the integral network evolved only gradually. The Egnatian Road was still the backbone of the system and the evidence from milestones and historical accounts suggests that it had retained its former strategic importance.[81] The two top-ranking settlements and over half of the second-ranking towns were still located on this road. The number of third-tier settlements had declined by one-third from the previous phase, but these are mostly the archaeologically elusive *civitates* capitals, the names of which disappear from the written records. Moreover, this decrease was offset by the greater number of second-tier settlements, which are now twice as numerous as in the previous phase. At the same time, the growing number of newly-founded or reoccupied hillforts resulted in a much wider base of the settlement hierarchy than in the preceding phase. With this in mind, it is perhaps more appropriate to speak of a reorganisation than of a general decline. More precisely, whereas in the upper reaches of the urban hierarchy the long-term trend towards centralisation continued, the base of the settlement hierarchy was expanding.

76 Milinković 2007, 159–193; Mikulčić 2003, 50–68; Dunn 1994, 61–80.

77 Ciglenečki 2023; see the numerous examples illustrated in Mikulčić 2003.

78 Milinković 2007, Fig. 6.

79 Kurti – Oberweiller 2020, 67–107.

80 For a well-studied example, just outside the study-area, see Poulter 1998, 463–512.

81 Fasolo 2008, 63–79; Gounaropoulou – Hatzopoulos 1985.

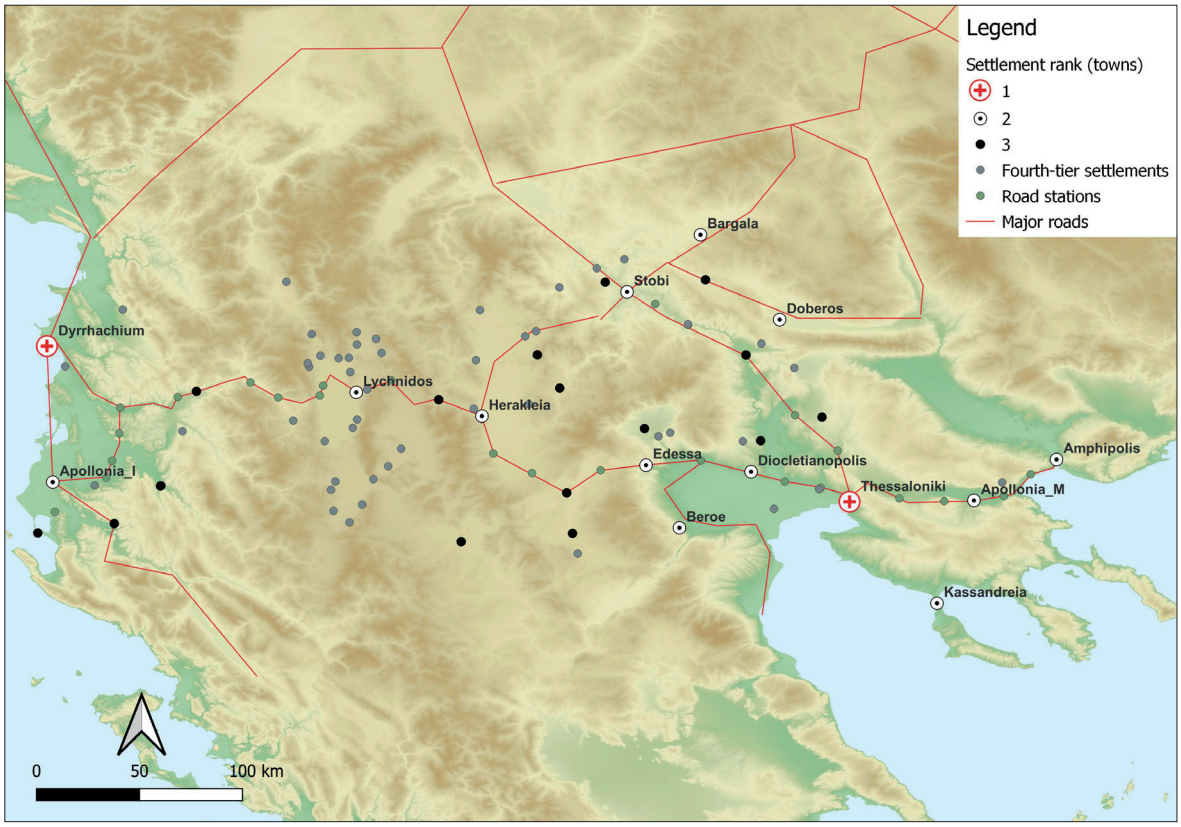


Fig. 12. Distribution of settlements ranked into distinct tiers in the study-area during Late Antiquity.

There are no major perturbances in the composition of the separate tiers. With one or two exceptions, the high-ranking settlements from the previous phase preserved their place in the hierarchy. A vague pattern in the recruitment of the new high-ranking settlements emerges: most of these are located in the western, less-urbanised segment of the study-area and their promotion to a higher rank continues the trends observed in the preceding phase.[82] Due to their locations in the system, both Lychnidos and Heraclea had already acted like second-tier settlements in the preceding phase. Stobi, until then the only second-tier town in the north of the area, was joined by Doberos (near Bansko, North Macedonia) and the newly-founded diocese of Bargala (near Štip, North Macedonia).[83] In Lower Macedonia, Pella renamed Diocletianopolis, joined the second-tier towns and filled the void in the urban map of this area created by its uncertain status in the preceding phase.[84] Even the gradual decline and demotion of Apollonia in Illyria can be viewed in the same light. It rectified the centuries-old anomaly of having two top-ranking settlements spaced less than 70 km apart. Most strikingly, all three newly-recruited third-tier settlements on the western segment of the Egnatian road had developed from fourth-tier stations, which stood approximately half-way between two autonomous towns (see above, Fig. 8). These changes led to a more even spread of urbanism than in the preceding phase, closing the large gaps in the urban coverage of the mountainous, western half of the area. The system was gradually maturing, with no clear signs of crisis in sight.

However, these developments did not lead to a uniform pattern across the entire area. In Lower Macedonia, the old 50-km module survived, but the network of third-tier, tributary settlements all but disappeared (Fig. 13). It was the completion of a millennium-long trend of centralisation.

82 Cp. the urbanisation of inner Pannonia during Late Antiquity, Donev 2024, 43–44.

83 Papazoglou 1988, 308–328.

84 Ogereau 2023, 261–266.

In theory at least, this absence of intermediary centres would have resulted in a reduced access to goods and services for the fourth-tier settlements. As mentioned, the latter are poorly studied in this segment of the study-area, but most of the known examples are located in the outer rings of the notional service territories of the second-tier towns, i.e. outside their market radii. This distribution seems to perpetuate the administrative principle of CPT, which was also characteristic of the preceding phases. Similar patterning can be observed in the Vardar Valley, where more of the old third-ranking towns had survived.

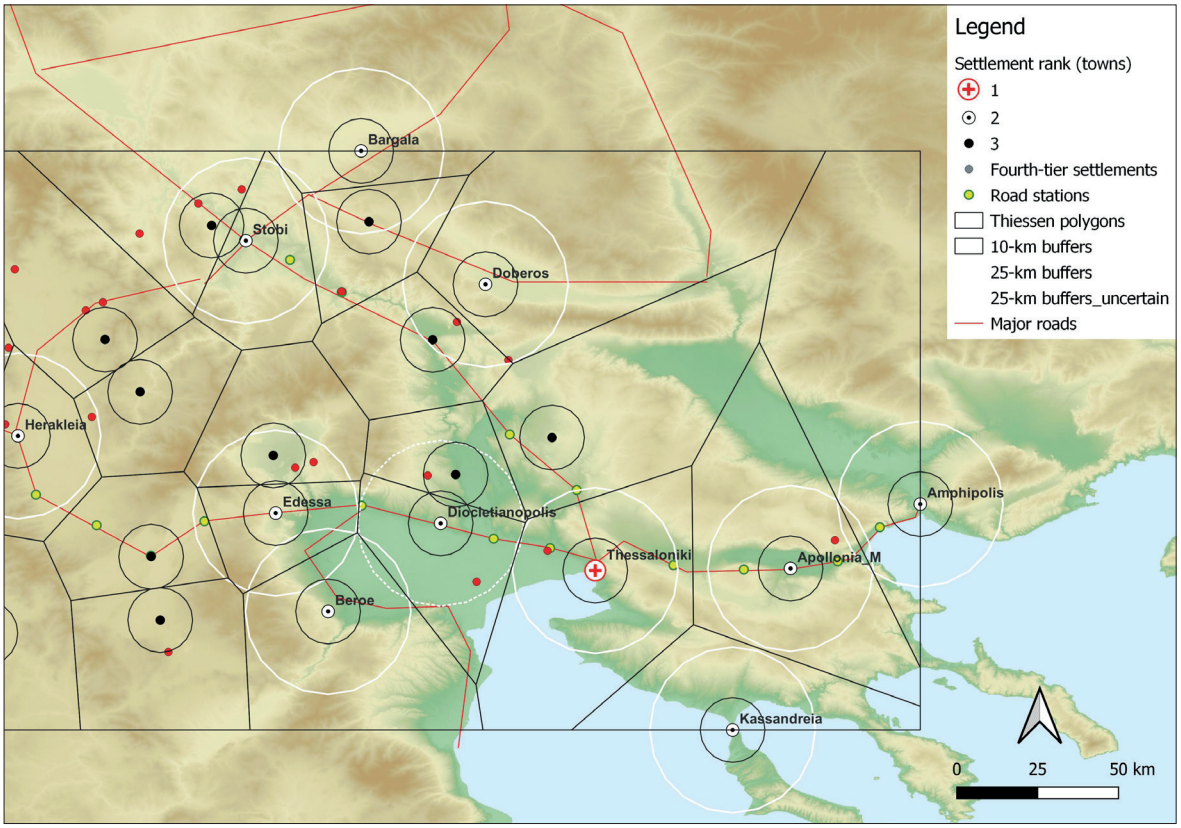


Fig. 13. Distribution of settlements ranked into distinct tiers in the eastern half of the study-area during Late Antiquity.

A different pattern was taking shape in the western half of the study-area (Fig. 14). There, the newly-founded third-tier settlements tend to appear close to the edge of the service-areas of higher-ranking towns, conforming more closely to the transportation than to the administration principle of CPT.[85] This is repeated on the Illyrian coast, in the hinterland of Apollonia, where the third-ranking towns of Aulon and Byllis (near Hekal, Albania) stand on the perimeter of the 25-km buffer around Apollonia. The result is a regular alternation of second- and third-tier settlements along the segment of the Egnatian road between Eordaia, and Dyrrhachium and Apollonia on the coast. Nonetheless, the district intercity distances remain high and the urban coverage partial.

It is difficult to see how the incoherent group of fourth-tier settlements fit into this scheme. There is some regularity in the spacing of the road-stations on the Egnatian Road in Lower Macedonia, where they are often located at the quarter of the distances between two neighbouring second-tier towns, but this is inconsistent and the pattern is broken by the absence of third-tier towns at half these distances. To some extent, the picture is certainly blurred by the intermittently reconstructed

85 Bekker-Nielsen 2020, 86.

network of hillforts. But turning to the best studied micro-regions does little to clarify the picture (Fig. 14). In the Ohrid basin, they are randomly scattered within the territory of Lychnidos, mostly outside the 10-km buffer around the central place, and in the neighbouring Korçe basin, they are unaccompanied by a higher-ranking settlement. In fact, in both micro-regions they are distributed along the rim of the basins and appear poorly related to the higher-ranking towns. In other words, they obey the rules of physical geography not those of supply and demand. This recalls the situation in the earliest, Hellenistic-Roman phase, during which most micro-regional units were occupied by series of small settlements of roughly equal size and rank. A similar process of settlement infill was taking place in Late Antiquity.

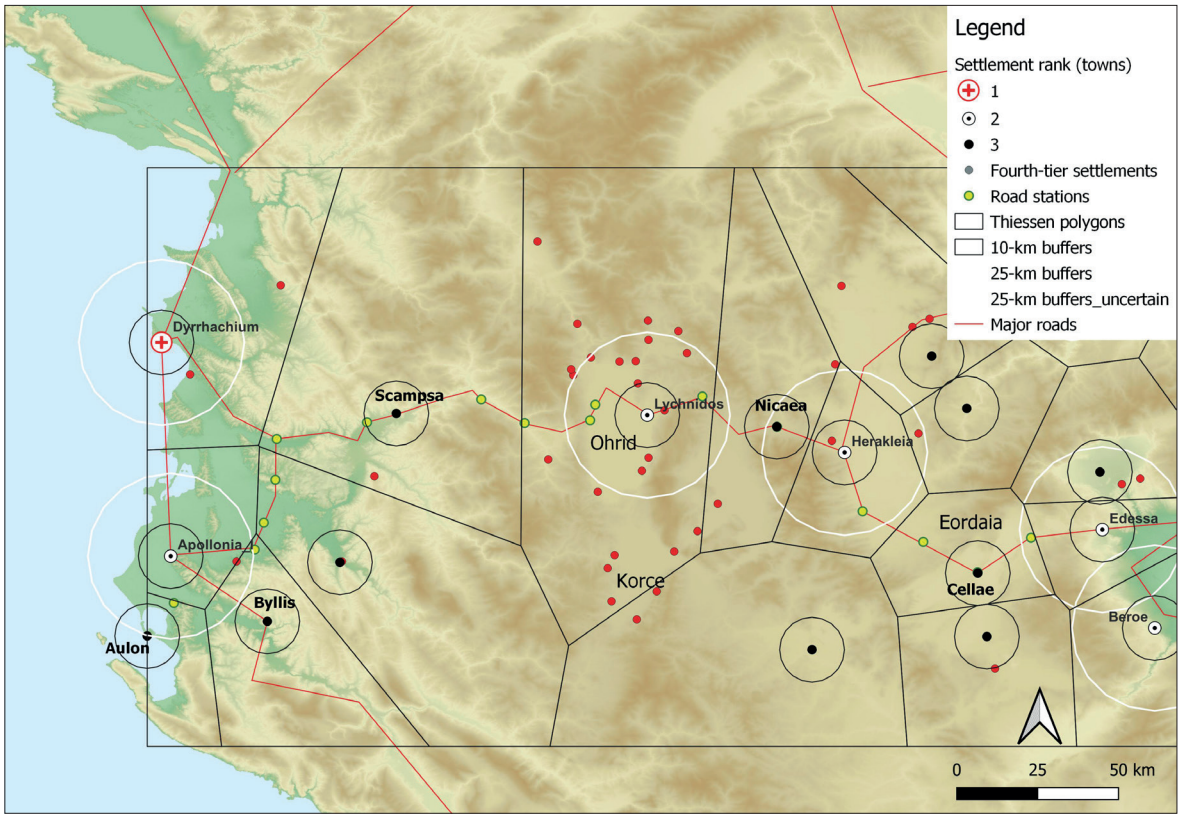


Fig. 14. Distribution of settlements ranked into distinct tiers in the western half of the study-area during Late Antiquity.

Admittedly, it is possible that the fourth-tier settlements were more differentiated than they appear at the current state of knowledge and that we are missing a key piece of the puzzle. If only a fraction of this group joins the third-tier settlements, a coherent pattern could potentially emerge. Recall that, archaeologically, the difference between these two tiers is thin. But at this moment, it is impossible to single out any such group in a non-arbitrary way.

Alternatively, the network of hillforts can be seen as an emergent subsystem within the frames of the old urban geography. As Antiquity was drawing to a close, this old-new settlement form was appropriating more and more of the trappings of urbanity and, by the end of this period, the difference between the decaying old Classical towns and the new Late Antique centres had been completely erased. From a long-term perspective, it was a return to the old pre-Roman pattern of small towns and dispersed urbanity.

Distribution of imported Red Slip Ware

Like in many parts of the Mediterranean, one of the most popular categories of imported tableware in the study-area in Late Antiquity was the African Red Slip Ware (henceforth ARSW).[86] The earliest examples on the Adriatic Coast are dated as early as the 2nd century AD, but this product begins to appear more regularly from the middle or the late 3rd century AD.[87] Pottery specialists distinguish between two waves of imports in this area: one dated between the middle of the 3rd and the middle of the 5th century AD, the second, from the end of the 5th century to the early 7th century AD.[88] Unfortunately, this distinction cannot be extended outside the major urban centres. Although represented, the other major interregional classes, like Phocaean and Cypriot Red Slip are encountered less frequently.[89] They either replace the ARSW or accompany it in small quantities. In this discussion, all Red Slip imports are united into a single broad category.

Unlike in the preceding phase, Red Slip vases were gladly imitated by local potters in Late Antiquity.[90] This local production has its own specific characteristics (see above), but the best examples are not easily distinguished from the imports. This needs to be kept in mind while reading the distribution maps. A far greater challenge is the introduction of a new category of tableware produced in Thessaloniki or its environs, from the early 4th century AD until the middle or the late 5th century AD. This is the Macedonian Grey Ware which overlaps both formally and functionally with the imported Red Slip categories and would have been a strong competitor to the latter.[91] Indeed, this tableware soon became highly popular in the study-area, even as the production of local Red Slip vases was picking up. Never before did a regionally produced ware achieve such popularity in this region. The repercussion of this change in regional production and supply on the thesis of this paper will shortly become apparent.

Imported Red Slip tableware, mostly ARSW, was discovered at 43 of the 94 sites with a documented Late Antique phase (Fig. 15).[92] This is a fairly modest increase from the preceding phase, in which only between 30–40% of the total number of studied sites contained finds of tableware imports. In view of the return of urbanity to the marginal basins and highlands in the western half of the study area, a higher percentage was expected. The increase from the preceding phase is undisputable, but it is still far from the high rate of dispersal of the Red-figure imports.

If anything, the imported Red Slip classes are dispersed far more widely than the earlier *terra sigillata* imports. The towns and settlements on the Egnatian road were still well-supplied, but they comprise less than half of the findspots of imported Red Slip tableware. This material is found not only along the other major regional roads, but also in remote mountainous areas, of which we hardly hear anything in the preceding phase. Like the *terra sigillata* imports, this category is present at sites of all ranks, including road-stations, hillforts and rural sites. The clustering of findspots in the hinterlands of the top-ranking towns is likewise repeated. This is both a discrete testimony to the vitality of the countryside in the territories of the major cities and the availability of these products at the points of entry into the system. Outside the territories of the major cities, imported Red Slip products are only found at rural sites located on the coast.

86 Bes 2015, 22–24.

87 Shkodra-Rrugia 2008, 19–27.

88 Shkodra-Rrugia 2008, 22; Hoxha 1995, 249–266; Stojanović-Anderson 1993, 55–56.

89 Hoxha 1995, 260; Stojanović-Anderson 1993, 55, 59–61.

90 Ončevska-Todorovska 2008, 68; Stojanović-Anderson 1993, 116–124; Sokolovska 1986.

91 Stojanović-Anderson 1993, 61–72; Hayes 1972, 405–407.

92 The total number of sites does not include the numerous hillforts in North Macedonia, because in most of these cases, only architectural surveys have been carried out. To avoid this and similar problems, only excavated or intensively surveyed sites are taken into account.

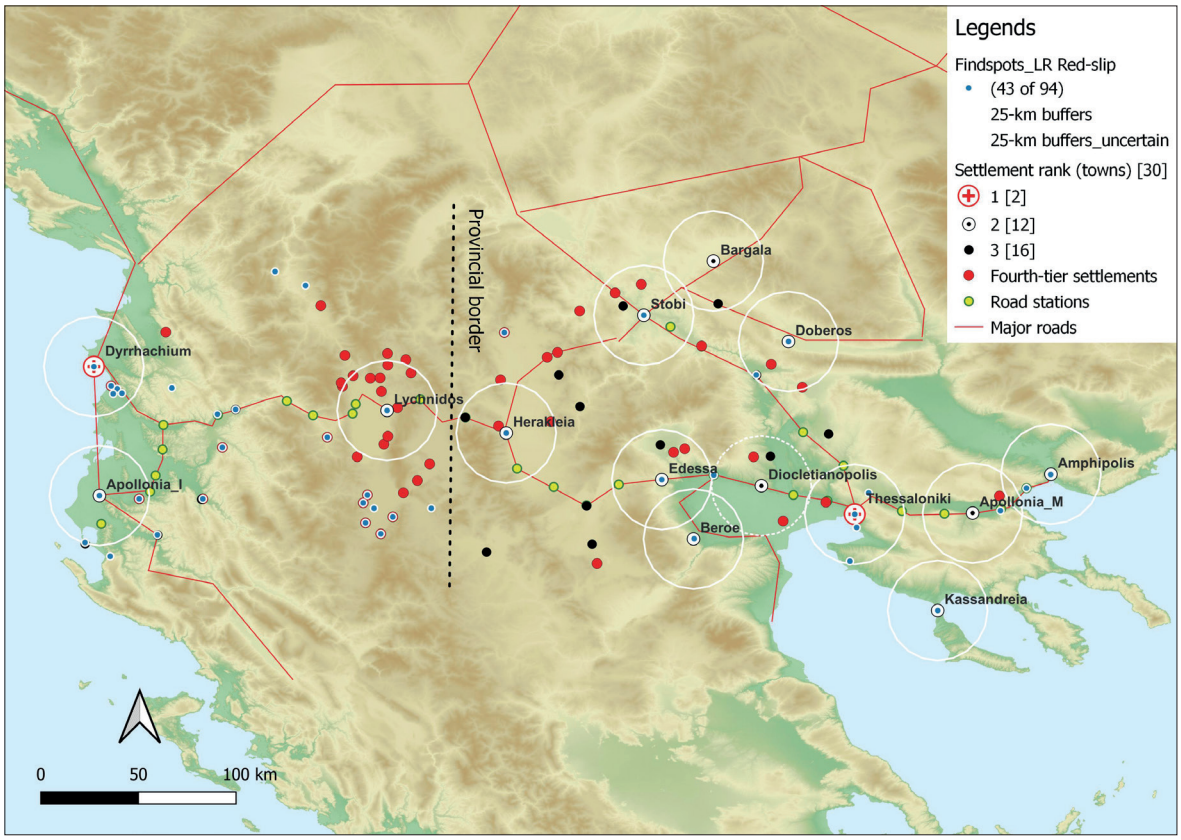


Fig. 15. Distribution of imported Late Roman Red-slip pottery.

But the most striking aspects of the distribution of the imported Red Slip tableware is its near absence from the third-tier settlements, which theoretically should have been the principal bases of supply for the countryside. However, this does not apply to the integral study area. Overall, the distribution of the findspots with Red Slip imports is not uniform. The majority are located in the western half of the study-area or the Candavian segment of the Egnatian Road. The change in density coincides with the provincial border between Macedonia and Epirus Nova. In the latter province, imported Red Slip are found in all third-tier settlements, whereas in the former, it is absent in nearly all third-tier settlements that have been identified and studied. Therefore, the theoretical role of this settlement category in the supply of imports to the countryside is not necessarily undermined. In Epirus Nova, the findspots of Red Slip imports are scattered in the most remote montane areas, whereas in Macedonia, much like in the preceding phase, they are pinned on the Egnatian and the Vardar Roads. The few exceptions are all coastal sites.

This cannot be ascribed to the subtle differences in the urban geography, although the weakened network of third-tier settlements in Lower Macedonia could have played a minor role. The most likely reason behind the resurrected dichotomy between the western and the eastern part of the study-area is the activity of the Thessalonican workshops and the popularity of the Macedonian Grey Ware. Throughout the 4th and much of the 5th century AD, it was the most popular tableware category in Lower Macedonia and the Vardar Valley.[93] Data for its distribution in many parts of the study-area are lacking, but impressions from my personal experience in the field and from the available archaeological publications indicate that it was at least as widespread as the ARSW in Epirus and in the Eastern Adriatic in general. Conversely, the rural areas in which Red Slip imports

93 For the Vardar Valley, see Ončevska-Todorovska 2008, 57–62; a comparative survey for this tableware category in Lower Macedonia is still lacking, see Karavieri 2010, 15–22.

are well-represented have rarely yielded finds of Macedonian Grey Ware. In view of the sharp dividing line between the two areas, it is tempting to bring this in connection with the new provincial border and the possible introduction of taxation on interprovincial trade, was this same divide not observed long before the creation of Epirus Nova.

Although the Egnatian Road retained its primacy in the regional urban system during Late Antiquity, it also started to lose the exclusiveness it had enjoyed in the preceding phase. The renewed spread of urbanism in areas away from the Egnatian Road was matched by the distribution of imported tableware. Combining the categories of imported Red Slip and Macedonian Grey Ware will likely result in frequences of findspots similar to those estimated for the Apulian and Attic Red-figure pottery. Both the urban geography and the spread of tableware imports signal a return to the Hellenistic-Roman pattern, even as the urban hierarchy was more complex than before.

Conclusions

During the long period of Roman Antiquity, the areas that border on the continental segment of the Egnatian Road went through a full cycle of transformation of the urban and road network. This part of the Balkan Peninsula had been connected to the outside world centuries prior to the Roman conquest and the construction of the Egnatian Road. As evidenced by the distribution of imported Red-figure vases, many parts of the study-area, including those that did not have direct access to the predecessors of the Egnatian Road, did receive small quantities of internationally traded goods. The wide dispersal of ceramic imports in remote, inland areas mirrors the diffuse urbanisation in this region in the centuries prior to and following the Roman conquest. Groups of fortified centres or *oppida*, of roughly equal size and standing appear in virtually all micro-regions in which modern fieldwork has been carried out. These micro-regional centres were unaligned to the new interregional road that traversed the study-area from west to east. For their supply with imported goods, they would have depended on the network of regional and local roads, put in place long before the arrival of Rome. This diverged road-network not only had the capacity of transporting goods over long distances, but also of spreading them widely across the adjacent areas. The lack of quantitative data obscures the likely differences in the accessibility of imports between the individual micro-regions. But in fact, this is already apparent from the higher density of findspots observed in the core-area of the Macedonian kingdom and in the hinterlands of the Greek colonies on the Adriatic coast. These areas had both a direct access to the coast and more developed urban networks than most other corners of the study-area, but from a long-term perspective, the whole region was supplied.

The construction of a single, linear road, demarcated by milestones and serviced by special facilities did not offset the existing network of local roads and towns immediately. Until the final conquest and pacification of the eastern provinces and the end of the civil wars, the Via Egnatia had been above all a military road. Primarily attuned to the geostrategic concerns of the Roman Republic, it was built to connect two major port-towns, bypassing the local centres which happened to be located off the shortest possible route. It was mainly used for the safe transport of the army and government officials.[94] As in other parts of the expanding Empire, these large infrastructural projects had a delayed but profound impact on regional society, most readily apparent in the changed urban geography in the post-Augustan era. It took nearly two centuries before the Egnatian Road attracted most of the urban sector in Roman Macedonia and became the central axis of its urban geography. By the 1st century AD, the old, branched out network of towns connected by local roads had been reduced to a small number of narrow, urban corridors. Although strictly speaking, the urban system of Roman Macedonia does not conform to the urban corridor model, mostly observed in provinces without a long urban tradition, urbanity was now chiefly limited to the Egnatian cor-

94 Fasolo 2008, 109–118.

ridor and the main north-south artery that linked Greece and the Aegean to central Europe. Famous ancient towns, although located at short distances from the main road, declined and many fell into oblivion, even if nominally they continued to function as centres of local communities. This is most strikingly illustrated in the case of Lower Macedonia, the most urbanised part of the study-area. The most important role in the new urban constellation was assumed by towns located at strategic points along the Egnatian Road, the key nodes in the long-distance traffic of goods and people and these became the bases for the Romanisation of the surrounding areas.

These developments in the urban geography are squarely matched by the distribution of imported tableware. In contrast to the preceding period, the predominant classes of imported tableware are now almost exclusively limited to the Egnatian corridor and the other major roads that crossed the province. This distribution is unrelated to settlement rank. Even low-ranking settlements and rural sites were getting their share of *terra sigillata* imports, as long as they were located on one of the main roads. Roman culture and wealth in general, were confined to narrow corridors beyond which, the demand for imported goods would have been low and supply would have been hampered by the reduced network of markets and roads.[95]

By the time of the High Empire, the Egnatian Road had nearly erased the centuries-old divide between the western and the eastern half of the study-area. The distribution of findspots of imported tableware does not show any visible differences between the spread of Italian and Eastern *terra sigillata*, although these could still emerge in the light of quantitative data. A similar trend towards uniformity can be observed in the urban developments in the area, the gradual deurbanisation of Lower Macedonia and the slow emergence of new urban centres in the mountainous, western parts of the province. Ironically, this process of maturing of the urban network was nearing to completion only in Late Antiquity, by which time new tendencies had started to emerge. As the urban network along the Egnatian road was becoming more structured than ever, the changed social and economic circumstances were giving rise to a new base of the settlement hierarchy. At first, this old-new category of fortified hilltop settlements belonged chiefly to the military and rural sectors, but with time, many of these settlements appropriated a number of urban attributes, whereas the old towns were gradually losing their urban appearance. Although the old urban hierarchy was formally maintained, true urbanity started to escape the frames of the old system, spreading into areas away from the main interregional corridors. This was an obvious step back towards the situation in the pre-Roman period, notwithstanding the important differences between these two periods.

The return of wealth and urbanity to the marginal areas of the system would have been impossible without the reactivation of the pre-Roman network of local roads. ARSW and other imports could only reach areas like the Upper Devol Valley or the Upper Drim through a series of local and regional roads that branched out from or ran parallel to the Egnatian Road. Like in the pre-conquest period, the distribution of imported goods in these areas did not necessarily depend on the presence of a developed and differentiated local urban networks. This is possibly a result of our inability to differentiate between the settlements from the bottom tier of the hierarchy, but other explanations also deserve a thought. The general impression is that, both in the first and in the final phase of the period studied, imports reached the marginal inland areas mostly in small quantities. This material was not necessarily distributed through the local markets, but was brought into the area by officers, soldiers or merchants as their personal belongings. Unfortunately, this plausible scenario cannot be tested without quantitative data from at least a few marginal units. This conclusion applies equally to the potential of the so-called administrative variant of the CPT model, clearly attested in Lower Macedonia, to supply the tributary towns with imported goods. Although in theory, this subtype of the CPT model did not offer an optimal market coverage, it could have nonetheless provided access to high-ranking services for tributary towns and rural settlements.

95 See the situation in neighbouring Epirus: Morison 2005, 12–24.

From a long-term perspective, the centralised model of urban corridors instated under the High Empire was truly exceptional. Its gradual disintegration began already in Late Antiquity, while the Egnatian corridor was still maintained and functioned as a linear road. The major historical events and processes at the time, like the establishment of the new capital of Constantinople and the declining importance of Italy, were certainly contributing factors. With the collapse of central authority at the end of Antiquity, the Egnatian Road ceased to exist as a single linear road and was decomposed into a loosely connected series of minor roads, often controlled by local warlords. The return to the state characteristic of the pre-conquest period was complete and it persisted throughout the Medieval and Ottoman periods.[96]

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