FORTRESSES AND THOLOS TOMBS 
OF HOMER’S BRONZE AGE THESSALY

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Abstract
Surrounded by historic mountain ranges, the valley of Thessaly heartland of north central Greece, mythical birthplace of Deucalion and his son Hellen from whom Hellas received its name, has been a virtual enigma to archaeologists. Except in the vicinity of coastal modern day Volos and the city of Larisa, extensive excavations have not taken place within the Thessalian province. Yet from the Iliad Homer identifies eight kingdoms in Thessaly, twenty-five percent of the Greek armada, which fought at Troy. This article provides onsite evidence of many of the Bronze Age fortifications of Homer’s Thessalian kings and tholos tombs rivaling those in Mycenae. We journey from Volos (Iolkos) on the east, site of Jason and the Argonauts fame, west to Pharsala (Pthia), homeland of Achilles, on to Trikala (Tricca) homeland of Asclepius, returning full circle through Larisa back to Volos. Treasures are there waiting for discovery.

ALL OF GREECE IS AN OPEN MUSEUM. Wherever one goes in modern Greece, from the mainland to the numerous islands, ancient sites can invariably be found. In remote locations you may stumble upon otherwise “Hidden Treasures,” ancient sites many which are only known to the locals – and with great pride.

The focus of this article is the province Thessaly (Thessalia). While it literally would be impossible to cover the scores of sites in this historic region, our emphasis will be on six specific fortresses identified by Homer in his Iliad. With photographs and supporting narrative we will dig into the Mycenaean period, the Late Bronze Age, of Homer’s Thessaly principally known today as the homeland of Achilles, hero of the Trojan War.

THE MYCENAEAN PERIOD OF THESSALY (2000 to 1050BC)

Surrounded by historic mountain ranges including the Pindus and Mount Olympus, the valley of Thessaly heartland of north central Greece, mythical birthplace of Deucalion and his son Hellen from whom Hellas received its name, has been a virtual enigma to archaeologists. Until recently archaeologists believed that the Mycenaean world of Homer’s Greece (the Bronze Age) did not extend throughout then northern Greece, the province of “Thessalia,” except on the coast (see map).

The eminent work of Wace and Thompson (1912), Prehistoric Thessaly, attests to that when they state (p 256) that in Thessaly “Mycenaean culture never flourished.” But they do show a connection between Thessaly and Troy when they state (p 232) “direct communication may be inferred.”
Hazel Hansen in her 1933 book *Early Civilization in Thessaly* states (p 20): “no great city flourished in the western plain” of Thessaly. Yet ancient Tricca (present day Trikala), home of the first pre-eminent healer, Asclepius, (centuries before Hypocrates) sent troops to fight in the Trojan War. These troops were commanded by Asclepius’ sons, Podalirius and Machaon. The fortress at Tricca dominated the western and southwestern entrances to the vast plain of Thessaly from the mountain passes of the lofty Pindus Mountain Range.

It took a 1964 researcher, V. R. d’A. Desborough, *The Last Mycenaean and Their Successors*, to clarify previous writers when he stated (p 127), that Wace and Thompson’s book “clearly suffers from the relative lack of knowledge of the course of this civilization,” stating further, “recent activities -- have enormously increased our knowledge of the Mycenaean period in Thessaly.” He further states (p 132) “Mycenaean penetration did not stop at Pharsala, but continued westwards over the plain.” And in 1981 Richard Hope Simpson wrote (p 161) in *Mycenaean Greece*, “Most of the Mycenaean settlements known in Thessaly are concentrated in the eastern parts and it is likely that Mycenaean civilization in Thessaly did initially spread inland from the east, principally from the Volos area.”

It is noteworthy to mention that through analysis of shards (ceramic parts) Hazel Hansen (1933) postulates that traders and settlers entered northern Greece about 2500BC from north of Macedonia (pp 50 & 68). Other traders and settlers entered through Macedonia as well as Crete from the east – Anatolia and Asia – in 2000BC bringing with them copper metal whose bronze was eventually superior to the stone of Neolithic days. She states (p 148), “coming from the southeastern lands of the Mediterranean where agriculture began – these people moved across Anatolia – to (p 149) the north Greek mainland and on to the Danubian area, and south to Crete; probably coming as traders, later as colonists. There was a series of waves, not a single migration.” Hence Greece (or Achaea as Homer called the region) entered into a new age – the Bronze Age of the Mycenaean – the Heroic Age of Ancient Greece – where well defended fortresses on the mountains, hills and ridges replaced the river-based villages of the Neolithic Age. She also believes there was a rather common culture which developed in the entire Aegean area and by 2000BC on “the Greek mainland we find a more or less cultural unity established. This is the great period of prehellenic history, and the way is paved for greater unity under Mycenaean leadership a few centuries later” (p 176).

**FROM VOLOS TO TRIKALA AND TO THE CARVED CLIFFS OF METEORA**

Eight kings (kingdoms) from ancient Thessaly brought thousands of troops and 268 ships to fight in the Trojan War – 25% of the total contingent of the Greek armada. In antiquity the region extended further south through the plateau at Domoko to the Sperchios River Valley and the current southern gateway city of Lamia near the coast. (This region, with its numerous ancient sites, will be discussed in future writings – see page following.)
The renown Pelion Mountain Range borders Volos to the north and east. To the west beyond the rolling hills and ridges is the vast plain of Thessaly, like a flat seabed extending some ninety miles inland from Volos through the cities of Pharsala, Sofades, Karditsa and Trikala to Kalambaka the western edge, whose monasteries look precariously perched on the pinnacles of rock cliffs carved millions of years ago. These cities are bordered to the south by the enormous Pindus Mountain Range. To the northeast through a low range of hills lies the city of Larisa itself surrounded by a vast plain – hence the southern and northern plains of Thessaly. From the air the plain resembles a vast butterfly. In antiquity Thessaly was a virtual country unto itself divided into four districts, often unified in defense. On the southeast coastal part of Thessaly are the Othrys Mountains, home of the legendary Titans, the giants who from mythology fought a bitter loosing battle with the Olympian gods. Mount Olympus itself, the home of the Olympian gods, is located on the northern edge of Thessaly eighty miles to the north from the southern border. Another mountain range encircling Thessaly from the northeast are the Ossa Mountains which at its northern foot at Tempi an opening was created several thousands years ago which, according to legend, if not geological evidence, allowed the huge Thessalian lake to empty into the Aegean Sea. This is indeed a very historic region with legend, mythology, and reality – Asclepius, the Titans and the Olympic gods, plus Hercules, Jason and the Argonauts, and Achilles of Trojan War fame -- woven into a fascinating historical narrative of myth and reality.

EASTERN THESSALY: VOLOS TO THE FORTRESS AT PHTHIOTIC THEBES

Homer’s Iliad makes reference to several cities in Thessaly (prehistoric Haemonia) – Iolkos (Volos), Pyrasus (near Phthiotides Thebes), Pherae (Velestino), Pthia (Pharsalus), Tricca (Trikala), Ithomi (Pyrgos Ithomi), Oehalia (Ihalia), Argissa (Argissa), Olooson (Elassona), Meliboea (Melivia), and others. Many of these are the capitol cities of the kingdoms of the eight Greek kings. Amazing how singing poets with their lyres over four to five centuries composed and recited verses on the legends and history of their tribes with Homer, a blind poet most likely from Chios, having it transcribed and saving for posterity his great works, the Iliad and Odyssey. The detailed and intimate knowledge preserved by word of mouth – most of it historically accurate – cannot be logically fathomed and understood just as the technology used to build the cyclopean fortresses of the Heroic Age are difficult to fathom today.

The cosmopolitan port city Volos (next page), is the starting point of this expedition to locate the “Fortresses and Tholos Tombs of Homer’s Bronze Age Thessaly.”
Mt. Pelion with its mythical centaurs (half man, half horse) where Achilles’ parents, Peleus and Thetis, were married and where he was raised as a child, to Jason and the Argonauts departing Iolkos in search of the golden fleece in the eastern Black Sea coast, to the commanding harbor of pleasure boats and yachts and commercial fishing and island tours, to Neolithic Sesklo (7000 to 3500BC, also overlapping the Bronze Age of 3500 to 1000BC), then Dimini considered the site of ancient Iolkos – a tantalizing image embellished by a visit to the Volos Archaeological Museum.

The first of our fortresses is found at the location of the Neolithic palace (megaron) at Dimini, below left, just west of modern Volos.

The Mycenaean site, not as yet open for public view, is located below to the right. King Pelias of Jason and the Argonauts fame ruled from this vicinity. During the Trojan War, Eumelus, according to Homer, son of King Admetus from Pherae, commanded “the men who lived in Pherae fronting Lake Boebeis in Boebe and Glaphrae and Iolkos’ sturdy ramparts.” We identify the palace site at Volos not merely as a point of departure but a key coastal site in the ancient province of Thessaly. Two large earth-covered tholos tombs (1500BC) were found. The canonical beehive shaped dome rock enclosure of the best preserved one measured 25 feet high covering a floor also 25 feet in diameter where a rectangular grave was located (above right). The tomb is entered by a 40 foot entrance (dromos). The tombs had clearly been robbed, as most in Greece, leaving little historical evidence.

From Volos we proceed southwest along the coast just past Neo Anchialos, often identified as Homer’s Pyrasus, to the second fortress that of Phthiotides Thebes, a magnificent site barely recognizable from the highway (next page).
The location is in the kingdom of King Protesilaus the first of the Greeks to die at Troy. His tomb to this day (after 3250 years) is found on the Dardanelles peninsula of present day Turkey. The fortress with its magnificent walls has a commanding view of the Pagasitikos Gulf (see above far right). Many of the present day remains cover not only the Mycenaean period but also the Classical and Hellenistic. Yet few excavations have taken place.

**SOUTHERN THESSALY: THE KINGDOM OF ACHILLES AND PELEUS**

Proceeding west across rolling hills we observe a valley to the south in which the yet unidentified site of King Protesilaus’ city of Philaki (near the existing village) is likely located, an area I recently researched. Further west we approach the fortress of Eretria (not to be confused with Eretria on the Euboean peninsula north of Athens). A towering hill with no easy path to the summit (below left) it overlooks what was its lower city to the northwest (photo right).

Further down, the vast plain of Thessaly slowly emerges from a low lying valley to the north, itself historic with Neolithic sites found along the Enipeus River beds. To the left of the roadway as we approach the city of Pharsala is the site of our third of Homer’s fortresses, found on a towering saddle-shaped mountain (next page). From the highway
it looks like any ordinary mountain range without special significance – yet it is “a hidden treasure” of Thessaly. This region extending from Pharsala (which my research shows to be that of Homer’s Phthia) thirty miles to the south reaching the Sperchios River valley and the coast leading to the Aegean Sea (an area part of ancient Phthiotida and very historic) was the kingdom of King Peleus and his son Achilles, hero of the Trojan War. From here, as Homer stated, Achilles sailed to Troy “all the fighters called Achaeans, Hellenes, and Myrmidons ranked in fifty ships, and Achilles was their leader.” The eastern part of Thessaly (not only Pharsala but to Volos and further east) was also called Phthia, the area southwest of Volos which was ruled by King Protesilaus.

Six miles northwest of Pharsala is a commanding hilltop called Ktouri, with the village of Helliniko at its southeastern foot, an area believed to comprise Homer’s Hellas, where the Greek nation received its name. (Another possible site for Hellas is at Melitea, south about 20 miles). King Eurypylus, who also fought at Troy, likely ruled in the vicinity of Ktouri from the city of Ormenion, currently unidentified. Near there on the road east to Pharsala along the Enipeus River a turning point in the Roman civil war occurred in August 48BC when the superior forces of Pompey, consul general of the East, were beaten by Caesar, consul general of the west in the infamous battle of “Pharsalia,” documented in the epic poem by Lucanius (and other historians). Caesar then ruled the entire Roman Empire.

Another six miles, this time northeast of Pharsala, is the town of Thetidio. This is the possible site of a huge temple dedicated to the sea goddess, Thetis, mother of Achilles. Farmland currently covers the site as does the ancient city of Scotussa a few miles north where grave robbers, as at many ancient sites, unfortunately ply their trade at night.

The fortress at Pharsala was considered impregnable. Surrounded mostly by natural cliffs on the southern ridge of the acropolis it had on the northern edge huge cyclopean walls (see photos next page) which in antiquity extended down to encircle the city below. A long dirt road winds its way to the top. The Thessalian plain extends to the north and west as far as the eye can see. On a clear day the snow capped peaks of Mount Olympus
60 miles straight north are visible. As with many other sites, ruins from several periods remain the latest being the Byzantine, then Roman, Hellenistic, Classical, Archaic, the Dark Age, and finally Mycenaean.

On the acropolis are several ruins; rectangular foundations with that at the highest point on the east side very likely being the location of the king’s palace (the megaron), a well, which all fortresses possessed, and several entry gates. The top is large enough to house a small city, the inner circle of the royal family and security troops. Burial sites are not usually located within the fortress or within the walls of the city below. In 2007, while building a road around the city of Pharsala, a cemetery dated to about 1000BC was unearthed revealing several cist (rectangular) graves and some very small tholos type tombs. Bones and jewelry were recovered. (See below left.)

The prize burial site of the city thus far discovered is a very large tholos and chamber tomb (above center) just south of the cemetery. It was excavated in the 1950’s. A key find was a one foot high black amphoric vase dated to 450BC (above right). It depicts a Homeric scene: Patroklas, childhood companion and possibly cousin of Achilles who was slain by Hector at Troy, lying face up on the ground with Greek and Trojan warriors fighting to claim his body (photo above right). In the ILIAD his death was a tragic event for Achilles but a key turning point in the war leading to subsequent battlefield heroics by Achilles, heroics described poetically, as all of the ILIAD was, with the savagery yet nobility of war woven brilliantly with the passion of human emotions and the intrigues of the Olympian Greek gods.

Ten miles southwest of Pharsala lies the town of Neo Monasteri, ancient Proerna, another of the many ancient sites found throughout Thessaly. Approaching from its southern end
the classical walls come into view (below left). Beneath the acropolis and the town below are located remains of the ancient settlement.

The hilltop occupies a strategic location with eyesight of the southernmost plain of Thessaly, the Pindus Mountain range to the southwest, as well as a birds eye view to the west (above right). Minor excavation work by the regional Ministry of Culture at Lamia is designed to provide public access to the acropolis. A huge earthen mound at the site of the local church is said to house an ancient buried temple likely from Homer’s Mycenaean period. Scarce archaeological resources and funding often plague the countries of the Mediterranean and particularly Greece where 500 years of foreign occupation and domination, largely ending during the last century, has a people with a history admired by the world rebuilding their fragile culture and economy.

SOUTHWESTERN THESSALY: FOOTHILLS OF THE LOFTY PINDUS MTNS.

Heading towards the western part of Thessaly the impressive southern tip of the Pindus Mountains form a huge arc, of some 50 miles like a quarter moon, from below Neo Monasteri extending northwest as far as the eye can see to the city of Karditsa, heartland of modern Greece, past the city of Trikala and further northwest to Kalambaka, the westernmost edge of the Thessalian plain home of the sheer rock cliffs of the Meteora (See map page 1). In Homer’s Thessaly the Dolopian tribes lived in the southern part of these mountains commanded by King Phoenix fighting at Troy under the command of the mighty Achilles. Many Mycenaean fortresses exist in these mountainous regions, also know as “Agrafa” (the unwritten region) never subdued under the Ottoman Turk occupation of Greece. These sites must remain to be written at a future time.

Proceeding west northwest from Neo Monasteri and past the city of Sofades lies Kierion a small hilltop fortress said to be associated with Homeric Arne. It is similar but smaller than the ridge at Ktouri 10 miles to the east yet as there it has a commanding 360 degree view of the surrounding plain. It can seen just north of the highway. Further to the west on the left past Kierion is the tholos tomb at Agios Theodoros (next page). It is of moderate size with a diameter of just over 16 feet above which rises its domed canonical rock roof 12 feet high but partially caved in. Associated with Kierion it is dated to about 1000BC. Approach ramps have been built by the local Ministry of Culture at Karditsa.
A few miles southwest of the city of Karditsa at Georgiko is a magoula (below left) which hides a large tholos tomb known to be that of Queen Laidas who reigned at Mitropoli just to the west. It is in good condition with an earth-covered and intact canonical roof 20 feet high extending down to the floor 20 feet in diameter with two 30 foot long dromos (entrances) to the door of the tomb the second inner dromos covered by huge one foot thick solid rock slabs (photos below center and right).

This “hidden treasure” robbed in antiquity, has not yet been designed for public view. It has been dated to the period of the Trojan War, 1250BC. As with all such tombs when the body was interned and the tomb sealed it was covered in the shape of a half-moon magoula and hidden with dirt and sediment.

At Mitropoli just west of the queen’s tomb some excavations have taken place at the temple of Apollo, east of the city (below left). Dated to the 6th century BC it is the only temple to the Olympian gods remaining in all of Thessaly.
(At Philia, in the center of Thessaly northeast of Sofades, are partially excavated ruins of the goddess Itoni Athena.) While only foundation remains were found at the Apollo site renovation by the local Ministry of Culture has partially restored the temple. Two exquisite artifacts have been found. This includes a 3½ foot high bronze statue of Apollo and a huge head of a horse similar to the thousands which roamed the Thessalian plains and formed the core of the greatest cavalry known in antiquity. The modern museum at Karditsa, a visit which is a must, houses these and sundry interesting artifacts. The supervisory archaeologist and head (Ephor) of the regional Ministry of Culture, Leonidas Hatziaggelakis, has with a small staff been preserving and protecting the regions ancient heritage. In the photo (previous page) he is on the right showing a model of the new museum to Dr. Briasas. Within this area particularly along the foothills of the Pindus range such as southeast of Karditsa (the northern borders of the Dolopian tribes in the ILIAD) at the town of Kedros and west at the town of Phanari are ancient sites, as throughout Thessaly, attesting to the once grandeur of the region and the ancient Thessalian civilization.

About 12 miles southwest is our fourth fortress identified in Homer’s ILIAD, Pyrgos Ithomi, which Homer called “rocky Ithomi terraced high.” This description still applies today after 3250 years (see below left). The description by Homer is amazingly accurate as in his ILIAD.

Today many locals, educated and uneducated, proudly and with passion discuss their historic region. This pride, this knowledge they possess, has been like in Homer’s time transmitted often by word of mouth from generation to generation despite 2000 years of occupation of Greece from the Roman Empire in the 2nd century BC, through the Byzantine Empire (though Greek), including Venetian rule, to the Ottoman Empire largely ending in the 19th century AD. Quite amazing!

Much of the Thessalian plain near the mountain foothills was a forest. This particular area of Pyrgos Ithomi was burned some 250 years ago by Veli Pasha. Hansen states (p11), “This large forest, called Kiurka, was burnt to prevent it from being a place of refuge for thieves.” Today huge “platanos trees” (the leaf which Canada has as its national symbol) remain at the foot of Pyrgos Ithomi and the village there today (photo above right). The acropolis on the fortress, while not particularly large, was most likely
used as a fort for soldiers – lookout towers with walls extending down (still visible) to encircle the town below.

WESTERN THESSALY: ANCIENT GOMPHI, TRICCA, & WESTERN PASSES

In June 48BC Caesar crossed through the Pindus Range with 11,000 troops and calvary and according to Sheppard, Pharsalus 48 BC, 2004 (p 50), entered “the plain of Thessaly at Aegenium (Kalambaka) – in the shade of the spires of the Meterora” (below left) in western Thessaly.

Needing provisions for his legions Caesar captured and burned the town and fortress at Gomphi, 25 miles to the southeast. From a distance the magnificent walls resemble a plate elevated on the western end cradling the town within – a unique layout similar to one at Crannon 20 miles north of Pharsala. While covered by extensive vegetation close inspection reveals their massiveness. These walls and the town, rebuilt by Byzantine Emperor Justinian in the 6th century, today do not reflect their glorious past. They sit waiting a long-term excavation project which will bring tourism and money to the local village. Gianni Giotas, whose lineage at Gomphi extends back for generations, patiently waits for the resurrection of his beleaguered town (photo above right). Eight years ago several burial sites some seven feet underground where found just outside the northern walls. Excavations revealed military artifacts likely belonging to Alexander’s Macedonian period of 280BC.

North northeast of Gomphi is the prime western strategic fortress of the Mycenaean period and our fifth to be identified in Homer’s ILIAD, Tricca, modern Trikala. It is the homeland of Asclepius, the famous healer of antiquity whose temples can be found throughout the Greek landscape (one of the most renowned being at Epidaurus southeast of Corinth where the best preserved classical theatre is found). From its acropolis it enjoys a panoramic 360 degree vantage point of the entire western plain of Thessaly (see page following).
Clearly visible are the rocky cliffs of the Meterora 20 miles northwest and to the southeast the open plain 50 miles to Pharsala and the pass through the Pindus Mountains to the south beyond Gomphi. It was from here, the Iliad states, that doctors to the Greek troops at Troy, Podalirius and Machaon, “the two sons of Aesclepius (who) led their units” to Troy. Some massive walls remain from this once glorious northwestern bastion of the Mycenaean world.

Eight miles southwest of Trikala at the foothills of the steep Pindus Mountain range, locals of the town of Pialia say it is from here that Aesclepius gathered wild mountain flowers used for many of his medical cures. (And like many ancient cities in Greece the classical theatre of Trikala is yet to be discovered.)

Coming full circle we head towards the center of the northern plain of Thessaly, the city of Larisa 40 miles to the east. On this route north of the southern plain we run into a series of mountain fortress some of which include Pellineion, Klokotos, Farkadona, and Zarkos, generally visible but not recognizable from the highway. Pellineion (below), 9 miles east of Trikala is an interesting fortress which as with many sites has a Greek Orthodox church dominating its ridge.

Some excavation has occurred at the ancient town below. To the northeast as the bird flies is the village of Ihalia which with the contingents from Tricca and Pyrgos Ithomi also sent troops to Troy. Across the highway from Pellineion is a small 4th century tholos tomb.

**NORTHEASTERN THESSALY: TEMPI PASS, LARISA, TO PHERAEE**

Viewing the remaining fortresses from the highway as we drive east towards Larisa, we are basically following the riverbed of the historic Peneios River originating far to the west in the Pindus Mountains. At Farkadona (but at a remote site known to locals) one
can see ancient columns lying in the riverbed while above the steep ridge remnants of a fortress can be seen (photos below). Along the entire riverbed are numerous Neolithic settlements, the pre Bronze Mycenaean Age, from the period of 7,000 to 2000BC.

At one site, Argissa (mentioned by Homer) 3 miles west of Larisa, Richard Hope Simpson, *Mycenaean Greece*, 1981 (p 166) states “was first inhabited in Paleolithic times and again in the early Neolithic period. There is evidence of a Mycenaean settlement on the mound itself.”

Throughout history invaders into Greece who approached from the north took the route through the pass at Tempi (where the mountain parted to allow the waters from the Thessalian plain to empty into the Aegean as legend has it). This is 30 miles north northeast of Larisa – a very narrow mountain pass where today the main north-south highway and train routes are found (see photos below). From this area, according to Homer, King Tenthredon’s son “sailed forty black ships” to Troy -- “and Prothous, son of Tenthredon, led the Magnesians, men who lived around the Peneios (River), up along Mount Pelion sloped in wind whipped leaves.” The cold winter wind from the northern Aegean Sea to this day blows strongly from off shore.

At the region of the city of Larisa and to the north, Homer states those who fought at Troy were “the men who settled Argissa and Grytone, Orthe, Elone, the gleaming citadel
Olooson: Polypoetes braced for battle led them on – and in his command sailed forty long black ships.” On the mound at Larisa are several excavated ancient ruins including cist graves (below left).

To the north one can view snowcapped mountains of Olympus and the Ossa Mountains to the northeast. Twenty years ago the classical theatre, the largest yet found in Thessaly, was discovered at the south end of the mound at the city center during building excavations (above right). “A few more years to complete its renovation,” the retired archaeological supervisor (Ephor) for the district, Athanasios Tziafas, stated in June 2008. Like at the Athenian Herodes Atticus Theatre below the Acropolis and the theatre at Epidaurus, theatrical events will no doubt be held here in the future.

On our final leg of this odyssey to discover the “Fortresses and Tholos Tombs of Homer’s Bronze Age Thessaly,” we journey southeast down the highway back to Volos. Forty miles on our right is the town of Velestino, ancient Pherae, our sixth and final fortress, where in Mycenaean times King Admetus ruled. As stated in the ILIAD, “their eleven ships (to Troy) were led by Admetus’ favored son, Eumeles, born to Admetus by Alcetis, queen of women, the most radiant daughter Pelias (king at Iolkos) ever fathered.” At Velestino the ancient acropolis is crested by a Greek Orthodox church. To the south of the church some remnants of the upper fortress walls can be seen with the ancient city lying under the modern town (photos below).
EPILOGUE

Fifteen miles to the east the Pegasitikos Gulf and the harbor and city of Volos come into view - back to the starting point to fathom our journey to the Bronze Age of Thessaly in which Homer’s ILIAD has illuminated the way.

The fortresses viewed are but a shadow of their glorious past. Other sites like Scotussa northeast of Pharsala and Crannon to the north (both previously mentioned) are not even a shadow of their past being completely obscured by underbrush and farmland yet with documented hometown heroes, champions in the ancient Olympic games.

Nearly all the fortresses identified in this article remain in “a virgin state of slumber” waiting an awaking to bring to life their glorious past. Imagine what these fortresses in antiquity must have looked like with men, women, children, horses of the best strain roaming the plains from the stallions Xanthus and Batus of Achilles to Bucephalus (a Thessalian horse) of Alexander the Great, the temples to their gods, their legends, their military might, their Olympic sports events, and their immense valley yielding bountiful harvests of fruits, vegetables, and grains from “the rich, dark soil of Phthia” – “mother of flocks,” as Homer stated, “where the women are a wonder,” and “those fighting men who lived in the Pelasgian Argos – all the fighters called Achaeans, Hellenes, and Myrmidons – and Achilles was their leader.” Achilles, whose name continues to resonate as the hero of the first written literature of the western world, the ILIAD, and whose name is associated with Thessaly, where today the name Achilles graces towns, hotels, streets, and other edifices. And the men of Iolkos (Jason and the Argonauts fame), of Pherae, Phthiotides Thebes, rocky Ithomi, Tricca, homeland of the renown healer Asclepius, and Mount Olympus, mythological home to the Olympian gods, are found. This is the lasting image that has remained from the historic land of Thessaly where the country of Greece received its name – Hellas – and where there except for Achilles and Protesilaus who were killed at Troy, lie the Greek Kings who fought at Troy and scores of other Greek kings from antiquity – there in tholos tombs somewhere waiting to be discovered in “Thessalia.