

## The Corinthian Periphery

William Caraher

### Introduction

The Corinthian periphery during the Roman period represents one of the most thoroughly investigated landscapes of the ancient Mediterranean world. For over a century archaeologists based at the sites of Ancient Corinth and later Isthmia conducted systematic investigations designed to explore the connections between both the city and its *chora* and also the Corinthia to the broader Mediterranean. As early as the first volume in the venerable Corinth excavation series, archaeologists explored the larger Corinthia retracing the footsteps of ancient travelers from Pausanias to Apuleius's fictional Lucius and St. Paul.<sup>1</sup> Excavations at the ancient harbors of Lechaion and Kenchreai (and the neighborhood of Koutsongilla) and at the Panhellenic sanctuary of Isthmia continue to add major nodes to the landscape. Extensive and intensive surveys, notably the work of James Wiseman, Timothy Gregory, and the scholars associated with the Eastern Korinthia Archaeological Survey, have further contributed to our understanding of the Corinthian landscape during the Roman period.<sup>2</sup> This work has populated the spaces between the sites with villas, farmsteads, roads, cemeteries, quarries, and religious sites. In this way, archaeology has come to challenge the tendency among both ancient authors including Pausanias and the author of Acts and some modern commentators to view this territory as largely empty space and unworthy of mention.<sup>3</sup>

The following chapter will continue this challenge by concentrating on the countryside in the immediate vicinity of the city of Corinth. It will follow the definition provided by David Pettegrew in his recent monograph on the Corinthian Isthmus.<sup>4</sup> Pettegrew, recognizing that the territory under the political control of the city of Corinth varied over time, but also that the area most proximate to the city had the greatest immediate connection to the city itself, limited his treatment to the Isthmus of Corinth. He defined this territory as bounded by the Geraneia mountains to the North and the line formed by Mt. Oneion and Acrocorinth to the south of the site. The harbor towns of Lechaion and Kenchreai form the western and eastern extent of city's immediate *chora* respectively. This definition also largely coincided with the boundaries of the Corinth's *chora* during the Archaic and Classical period, which, of course, would not have necessarily coincided with its boundaries during the Roman period, but nevertheless offers a

---

<sup>1</sup> Harold North Fowler and Richard Stillwell, *Introduction, Topography, and Architecture. Corinth I.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932).

<sup>2</sup> James Wiseman, *Land of the Ancient Corinthians.* (Göteborg, P. Åström, 1978); For a survey of relevant work from Timothy Gregory see: Timothy Gregory, "Religion and Society in the Roman Eastern Corinthia," in *Corinth in Context: Comparative Studies on Religion and Society*, ed. by Steven J. Fieser, Daniel N. Schowalter and James C. Waters (Leiden Brill, 2010), 433-475; for the Eastern Korinthia Archaeological Survey see David K. Pettegrew, *Corinthian Countrysides: Linked Open Data and Analysis from the Eastern Korinthia Archaeological Survey.* (Grand Forks, ND, The Digital Press at the University of North Dakota, forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor. "The Corinth that Saint Paul Saw." *The Biblical Archaeologist* 47.3 (1984): 147-159.

<sup>4</sup> David K. Pettegrew, *The Isthmus of Corinth: Crossroads of the Mediterranean World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 15-16.

useful way to understand the countryside with regular social and economic connections to the urban core during the first four centuries of our era. There are, of course, territories associated closely with the modern and ancient Corinthia that fall outside the territory considered in this contribution. James Wiseman's survey of the region offers a glimpse of some of the sites present in the rolling hills south of the city and around the ancient sites of Kleonai, Phlius, Nemea, Tenea, Solygeia, and the modern villages of Sophiko and Korphos.<sup>5</sup> Work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has greatly expanded our understanding of these areas during the Roman period and their exclusion from this chapter reflects as much the abundance of new knowledge as the primacy of the immediate hinterland of the city itself.

The major settlements within the territory around the city, especially Lechaion and Kenchreai, were not politically independent and depended on had close economic, social, and religious ties to the city of Corinth both historically and in the Roman period. These settlements, as well as the Panhellenic sanctuary at Isthmia and numerous other small sites in the region, benefited from their situation at the intersection of east-west and north-south routes through the area as well as the arable land provided by the Isthmus itself. Among the region's most enduring features is the ancient drag-way called the diolkos which many scholars traditionally imagined made it possible to transport ships from the Saronic to the Corinthian Gulf across the narrowest point of the Isthmus.<sup>6</sup> By the end of the first century, however, Nero's abortive effort to dig a canal through the Isthmus had cut the diolkos rendering it useless as trans-Isthmian cart path. The canal and the diolkos both emphasize the Corinthia's distinctive place at the intersection of east-west across the Mediterranean and north-south routes through Greece. This situation emboldened Donald Engels to argue that the city of Corinth and its hinterland allowed it to exist as a "service city."<sup>7</sup> In his estimation, the regions prosperity emerged from serving the needs of travelers through the area, their payment of tolls and other fees, notably for the use of the diolkos, and the role that merchants played in maintaining a vast and largely stable market for the region's relatively modest agricultural outputs.

Most scholars today remains unmoved by Engels' distinct explanation for Corinthian prosperity.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore many are unconvinced that the regular movements of goods across the Isthmus, much less regular movements of ships across the diolkos, shaped the Corinthian economy in significant ways. Engel's book nevertheless reflected the widely held understanding that the position of the city and its immediate hinterland at the intersection of interregional routes created a unique set of circumstances that shaped its development once it became integrated in the Roman Empire. A Roman example, that may well anticipate later views of the territory, involved the transporting of ships across the Isthmus by the Roman general Marcus Antonius on his way to suppress the Cilician pirates in 102 BC. This appears to have had such an impact on

---

<sup>5</sup> Wiseman, *Land of the Ancient Corinthians*, passim.

<sup>6</sup> See for citations: David K. Pettegrew, "The Diolkos of Corinth." *American Journal of Archaeology* 115, no. 4 (2011): 549-574.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Engels, *Roman Corinth: An Alternative Model for the Classical City*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> David Pettegrew, "The Diolkos and the Emporion: How the Land Bridge Frame the Commercial Economy of Roman Corinth," in *Corinth in Contrast: Studies in Inequity*, eds. Steven J. Friesen, Sarah A. James, and Daniel N. Schowalter, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 127-133.

local residents for them to commemorate it in heroic verse.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the memory of such a heroic feat inspired the Emperor Nero's ambitious but failed efforts to excavate a canal through the Isthmus in the 1<sup>st</sup> century and Theodosius II more successful effort to construct a wall across its width in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> These gestures reflect the significance of the Corinthian chora to affairs that extended well beyond the city of Corinth itself. Thus the region's situation as "the crossroads of the Mediterranean world," as David Pettegrew calls it, contributed to the significance of the city of Corinth as much as the countryside shared in the fate of the city itself.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, it is important to realize that these celebrated events were extraordinary and the major settlements, routes, and even humble farmsteads that connected the Corinthia to the city itself shaped the daily life of region's residents in altogether more mundane, but no less archaeologically visible and significant ways. This reading of Corinth's hinterland seeks to balance the impact of outside forces on our view of region against the growing body of archaeological evidence for the bustling character of the territory itself.

## The Sites

Three major sites stand out in the immediate hinterland of the city of Corinth: Kenchreai and Isthmia in the Eastern Corinthia and Lechaion facing westward on the south coast of the Corinthian Gulf. Archaeological work at these sites remains ongoing and continues to produce new scholarship, synthetic works, and sometimes productive debates. Scholars have shown particular interest in understanding the development of the sites during the Roman period especially in the centuries following Caesar's re-founding of the city of Corinth in 44BC. Kenchreai and Lechaion, in particular, represent largely Roman period towns. The Panhellenic sanctuary at Isthmia where monuments to its illustrious Greek past continued to stand, appears to have enjoyed a significant facelift associated, it would seem, with the re-establishment of the Isthmian games in the middle of the first century AD. The transformation of Isthmia, Kenchreai, and Lechaion four centuries later likewise attracts continued attention and debate. The impact of the military and political turmoil of the third and fourth centuries, the shifting character of ancient religious life, changes in the nature Roman urbanism, and emergence of new economic relationships left traces across sites in the Corinthian chora as surely as they impacted the city itself. Thus the first four centuries AD would appear to offer a narrative arc brackets by evidence for the re-emergence of the Corinthian countryside and its transformation at what generations of scholars regarded as "the end of antiquity."

### *Isthmia*

The Panhellenic sanctuary to Poseidon appears to have been abandoned after the Mummian

---

<sup>9</sup> Pettegrew, "Diolkos," 567; Elizabeth Gebhard and Mathew W. Dickie, "The View from the Isthmus, ca. 200 to 44 BC," in *Corinth: The Centenary, 1896-1996. Corinth XX*, ed. Charles K. Williams and Nancy Bookidis. (Athens: American School of Classical Studies, 2003), 275.

<sup>10</sup> For Nero's canal see: Pettegrew, *Isthmus of Corinth*, 166-206; For the Hexamilion wall see: Timothy E. Gregory, *The Hexamilion and the Fortress. Isthmia V*. (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> Pettegrew, *Isthmus of Corinth*.

sack of the city of Corinth in 146BC after which the games were transferred to the city of Sikyon. Gebhard, following Broneer, reasonably suggest that the games were held in that city and the Sanctuary of Poseidon lay abandoned. It would have been after 146BC and the abandonment of the sanctuary that the “long altar” associated with the temple is destroyed to make way for a road connecting Corinth and the harbor at Schoinous.<sup>12</sup> Gebhard and Dickie note in their survey of the history of the sanctuary between 200 and 44BC that the construction of this road (including cut wheel ruts) indicated that Corinth remained a key place in the Corinthian landscape which either suggests that the abandonment of Corinth was not as absolute as sometimes thought or that the site of Corinth remained a central node in the regional economy and road system.<sup>13</sup> The restoration of the games and the sanctuary appears to have occurred sometime around the middle decade of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Oscar Broneer, the longtime excavator at Isthmia even speculated that the restoration of the Isthmian games prompted Paul to stay in Corinth at this time.<sup>14</sup> Notwithstanding such speculation, the recent publication of the Roman pottery from the sanctuary by John Hayes and Kathleen Slane appears to confirm this with the majority of material from the sanctuary dating to the first through third century AD.<sup>15</sup> The scholarship from Isthmia reveals that the site saw maintenance, modification, and even expansion throughout the first three centuries AD. A shrine to the hero Palaimon is among the most notable monuments for this period. It appears to date to the mid first century AD and may well have replaced an earlier monument to the child-hero whose mythical burial at the site may have formed part of the site’s etiology.<sup>16</sup> This monument provided some of the earliest archaeological evidence for the restoration of the sanctuary to Corinthian control and the restarting of the Isthmian games at the site.<sup>17</sup> It seems likely to have been part of a larger renovation of the sanctuary perhaps intended to coincide with Nero’s interest in the Isthmus which culminated with his failed attempt to construct a canal. In fact, Gebhard has argued that the entire sanctuary saw significant landscaping and the theater was renovated during in the mid first century.<sup>18</sup> Gregory and Mills published a monumental gate of a similar date which evidently marked the entrance to the Peloponnesus and was preserved into later periods when it was built into the Northeast Gate of the Hexamilion Wall.<sup>19</sup> Another major phase of remodeling occurred in the Antonine period and featured a lavishly decorated Roman bath.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Gebhard and Dickie, “The View from the Isthmus,” 270.

<sup>13</sup> Sarah A. James, “The South Stoa at Corinth: New Evidence and Interpretations.” *Hesperia* 88, no. 1 (2019): 155-214.

<sup>14</sup> Oscar Broneer, “Paul and the pagan cults at Isthmia.” *Harvard Theological Review* 64, no. 2-3 (1971): 169-187.

<sup>15</sup> John W. Hayes and Kathleen Warner Slane. *Late Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman Pottery. Isthmia XI*. (Athens: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth R. Gebhard and M. W. Dickie, “Melikertes-Palaimon, Hero of the Isthmian Games.” In *Ancient Greek Hero Cult. Proceedings of the Fifth International Seminar on Ancient Greek Cult*, Göteborg University (21--23 April 1995), ed. Robin Hägg, (Stockholm: Swedish Institute in Athens, 1995), 159-165.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth R. Gebhard, “Isthmia in the Roman Period: The Isthmian Games and the Sanctuary of Poseidon in the early empire.” In *The Corinthia in the Roman Period: A Symposium Held at The Ohio State University on 7-9 March, 1991*, ed. Timothy E. Gregory, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1994), 78-94.

<sup>18</sup> Gebhard, “Isthmia in the Roman Period.”

<sup>19</sup> Timothy E. Gregory and Harriane Mills. “The Roman Arch at Isthmia.” *Hesperia* 53, no. 4 (1984): 407-445.

<sup>20</sup> Timothy E. Gregory, “The Roman Bath at Isthmia: Preliminary Report 1972-1992.” *Hesperia* 64, no. 3 (1995): 279-313.

The excavations at the Roman bath, which featured a massive monochrome figural mosaic and walls covered with marble revetment, offers a window into the later history of the sanctuary. Ultimately the north wall of the Roman bath is built into the Theodosian Hexamilion wall which likely dates to the beginning of the fifth century. The bath itself, however, appears to have remained in use until the end of the fourth century on the basis of ceramics found in the furnaces and in drains in the building.<sup>21</sup> This date roughly coincides with the last literary reference to the sanctuary as a cult site in Oration 14 of Libanius.<sup>22</sup> This appears to date about a century later than evidence from areas of the site more closely associated with the traditional cultic life of the sanctuary (and indeed sanctuary sites closer to the city of the Corinth). Gregory offers a way to reconcile this discrepancy when he suggests that by the middle 4th century large scale cult activities had given way to more informal practices which would have left a far less visible traces in the archaeological record.<sup>23</sup> The distribution of lamps, for example, across the entire sanctuary may suggest simpler and perhaps even more personal devotional practices continued for over a century after the end of formal cult activity.

### *Kenchreai*

It is beyond a doubt that the Corinthia and the neighborhood of Isthmia remained a “busy” place throughout the first four centuries AD. Recent and ongoing research at the settlement site of Kenchreai confirms this. The majority of the harbor installation appears to be Roman in the date. Excavations at the harbor have revealed the remains of a bustling and apparently well-off harbor town. An elaborate villa with a view of the sea stood on the north mole of the harbor dating to the first century AD, but continuously modified over the three succeeding centuries. The south mole featured what is likely a more public building initially identified as an Iseion by the excavator in an effort to reconcile the archaeological remains with scant notices preserved in Pausanias and Apuleius’s fictional account of Lucius’ conversion in his second century novel.<sup>24</sup> Another influence is the famous discovery of over a 100 *opus sectile* glass panels depicting Nilotic and harbor scenes (hence the connection to an Iseion) as well as officials, poets and philosophers, and deities. These spectacular panels date to the fourth century and the excavators discovered them amid fragments of the wooden crates in which they were delivered to the site. Their fate apparently sealed by a catastrophic earthquake which caused not only the collapse of the building but also the subsidence of the buildings on the south mole.<sup>25</sup> The frequency of Nilotic scenes in fourth century iconography mitigates against any interpretation of these spectacular panels that insists they be associated with a sanctuary to Isis. Rothaus suggested that the building might be a fountain court, or a Nymphaeum, but it could also be part

---

<sup>21</sup> Gregory, “The Roman Bath at Isthmia,” 293.

<sup>22</sup> Richard M. Rothaus, *Corinth, the First City of Greece: an Urban History of Late Antique Cult and Religion*. (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 84-92.

<sup>23</sup> Gregory, “Religion and Society in the Roman Eastern Corinthia”

<sup>24</sup> Robert Scranton, et al. *Kenchreai, Eastern Port of Corinth: Results of Investigations by the University of Chicago and Indiana University for the American School of Classical Studies at Athens*. (Leiden: Brill, 1976).

<sup>25</sup> Rothaus, *Corinth*, 70-83.

of another lavish private residence or even a Neoplatonic school.<sup>26</sup> The presence of column inscribed with the word OPTIA, found in the destruction levels covering the fifth century basilica style church installed on the south mole, provides the best evidence for the worship of Isis at Kenchreai as the excavator understood the term orgia to be an epithet for Isis.<sup>27</sup> Rife argued on the basis of letter forms from this inscription dates to fourth or fifth century which demonstrates the persistence of non-Christian cult activities well into the Late Antique period.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, the location of this column in a secondary context makes it impossible to say any more about the cult of Isis at Kenchreai during this period. The column, the glass panels, and the elaborate and well-appointed buildings on the north and south moles nevertheless contribute to the image of a prosperous and fashionable Roman town.

The most significant contribution to our understanding of the settlement at Kenchreai comes from Joseph Rife and Eleni Korca's publication of their recent excavations at on the Koutsongila ridge which extends from the north of the excavated harbor site.<sup>29</sup> Over the course of the first to fourth centuries, this peripheral area served as a cemetery, a thoroughfare, and the site for elaborate buildings with possible residential and ritual functions. The cart road that passed through this area presumably connects the town of Kenchreai to the larger world of the Isthmus (and beyond) and a traveler would have passed through a cemetery where they might discern the social organization of the community and encountered varying levels of prosperity, prestige, and family relations. Among the most spectacular of the monuments recently published by Rife and Korca is a lavishly decorated octagonal building dating to the fifth century AD which the excavators propose to be either a monumental tomb or a chapel, perhaps for the veneration of a local martyr or holy figure.<sup>30</sup> This building, along with the Christian basilica installed in the fifth or sixth centuries on the south mole of the harbor reflects the continued investment in the religious landscape of Kenchreai into the Late Roman period.<sup>31</sup>

It is natural that scholars gravitate toward discussions of the evidence for religious life at Kenchreai owing to its appearance in the New Testament as the home of the deaconess Phoebe and the city's festival to Isis role as the backdrop to Lucius miraculous transformation from donkey to human in Apuleius's novel. Rife pulls together fragmentary archaeological evidence to demonstrate the presence of cults to Dionysos and to Pan in the neighborhood of Kenchreai. An inscription refers to a certain Paulina who served as basket-bearer presumably in the cult of Dionysos. It was set up by her parents, C. Heius Agathemerus and Terentia, who were members of a prominent Corinthian and Peloponnesian family.<sup>32</sup> While the presence of these cults is unsurprising, this evidence contributes further to our understanding of Corinthian life outside of the city of Corinth itself.

---

<sup>26</sup> Rothaus, *Corinth*, 70-83.

<sup>27</sup> *SEG XXVIII* 387.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph L. Rife, "Religion and Society at Roman Kenchreai," in *Corinth in Context: Comparative Studies on Religion and Society*, ed. by Steven J. Fiesen, Daniel N. Schowalter and James C. Waters (Leiden Brill, 2010), 391-432

<sup>29</sup> Elena Korca and Joseph L. Rife, eds. *On the Edge of a Roman Port: Excavations at Koutsongila, Kenchreai, 2007-2014. Hesperia Supplement 52.* (Athens: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2023)

<sup>30</sup> Korca and Rife, *On the Edge of a Roman Port*, 216-231.

<sup>31</sup> See Rife, "Religion and Society" and Rothaus, *Corinth*, 70-83 for a summary of this.

<sup>32</sup> Rife, "Religion and Society," 412-421.

## *Lechaion*

The final major site of the Corinthia is the western harbor of the city of Corinth. Unlike Isthmia and Kenchreai, excavations at Lechaion have almost exclusively focused on the Late Roman remains of the harbor town including the settlement and the massive 5th or 6th century basilica style church. As with Kenchreai, a literary account provides a possible window into life in 1st century Lechaion. Plutarch's *Dinner of the Seven Wise Men* was set in Lechaion in the age of Periander, but most scholars agree that the bustling backdrop depicted in this text owes much to Plutarch's own familiarity with the harbor city.<sup>33</sup> Plutarch describes taverns, temple precincts dedicated to Aphrodite and Poseidon, a gymnasium and park near the sea as well as colonnaded promenades not uncommon in Roman cities in the East. Most importantly, Plutarch records the presence of a road connecting the harbor to the city of Corinth and Strabo writing around the same time, notes the long walls connecting the harbor to the city of Corinth remain visible.<sup>34</sup> Today, massive dredge piles dominate the harbor site. These dune-like piles almost certainly derive from the excavation of an inner harbor area in antiquity. A small rectangular foundation remains visible on a small rise in the marshy area that was once the inner harbor. The date of it is unclear, but is likely Roman. In general the archaeological evidence associated Lechaion in the first four centuries, however, remains scant.

What is known about Roman Lechaion largely derives from studies of the harbor itself conducted by a number of geoscientists over the last three decades.<sup>35</sup> The main point of contention in their work appears to revolve using core samples to determine the nature and date of catastrophic events at the harbor. One of these tsunami events has been argued to date to the first century AD and perhaps have triggered a major renovation of the harbor. While matter of tsunamis evidence remains unresolved, recent archaeological work at site by the The Lechaion Harbor and Settlement Land Project has excavated the remains of a civic basilica with Augustan and later first century phases.<sup>36</sup> This would loosely coincide with the date that Rothaus has proposed for the renovation of the harbor's two moles and with a period of investment noted at other sites in the Corinthia.

## **The Routes**

As the previous section demonstrated, the relationship between the sites of Lechaion, Kenchreai, and Isthmia to the city itself is at least partly chronological. Julius Caesar's founding

---

<sup>33</sup> Richard Rothaus, "Lechaion, Western Port of Corinth: A Preliminary Archaeology and History." *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 14, no. 3 (1995): 293-306.

<sup>34</sup> Plut. *Septem.* 2; Strabo, 8.6.22.

<sup>35</sup> For a summary of this debate and citations see: Nicholas L. Riddick et al., "Multi-proxy Palaeoenvironmental Record of Coastal Tectonic Uplift and Abandonment (ca. 6th c. CE) of Lechaion's Inner Harbour, Ancient Corinth, Greece." *Quaternary Science Reviews* 267 (2021); E. Kolaiti et al., "Palaeoenvironmental Evolution of the Ancient Harbor of Lechaion (Corinth Gulf, Greece): Were Changes Driven by Human Impacts and Gradual Coastal Processes or Catastrophic Tsunamis?" *Marine Geology* 392 (2017): 105-121.

<sup>36</sup> For a basic description of this project see: <https://cla.csulb.edu/departments/classics/lechaion-harbor-and-settlement-land-project/> (Accessed 4 January 2024).

of the colony *Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis* likely triggered a major influx of settlers to the region which was further expanded decades later with the settlement of Augustan veterans. As we have seen, the growing population of the city and its countryside is archaeologically visible in the earliest Roman phases at Isthmia as well as in the harbor area of Kenchreai and Lechaion. These developments reflected not only increased imperial interest in the region, but also the needs of new settlers who began to transform the Corinthia to suit their needs as both residents of the Roman world and as denizens of a landscape laced with roadways, monuments, and history.

### *Centuriation*

Perhaps the most obvious connection between the city of Corinth and its Roman countryside was the pattern of land tenure and efforts to reorganize the space to prepare it for Roman settlers. While there remains some debate when the initial efforts at centuriation occurred, David Romano has demonstrated that by the time of the founding of Caesar's *Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis* in 44BC the Romans had surveyed and divided Corinthian territory to make it available for settlers, and, more important, made it possible to impose a cadaster which would facilitate the taxation of the territory.<sup>37</sup> Evidence for this centuriation remains visible in the modern and ancient landscape with the Lechaion Road connecting Corinth with the port of Lechaion forming the *Cardo Maximus* which was presumably the inspiration for Plutarch's dinner companions as they traveled from Corinth to the harbor town. Romano argues that a second centuriation of Corinthian territory occurred during the reign of Vespasian. Traces of this remain visible not only in contemporary Corinthian field boundaries, but also in the orientation of buildings at the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore in Corinth itself where buildings constructed around 70AD appear to respect a new line of orientation. Romano plausibly suggests that this centuriation, which appears to include a much larger area than the earlier effort coincided with Vespasian's founding of a new colony at Corinth, *Colonia Julia Flavia Augusta Corinthiensis*, and ending Nero's policy of exempting Greek cities from taxation. Pettegrew notes that we should not confuse the centuriation of the Corinthia with its resettlement after the disruptions of the Hellenistic period and stressed that episodes of investment, more intensive settlement, and economic development appear to have occurred periodically in the Corinthian countryside. The pattern observed in the Corinthia nevertheless has parallels with patterns present at other Roman colonies in Greece.<sup>38</sup>

### *Routes and Roads*

The centuriation of the Corinthian chora provided public rightaways for roads that connected the city center to its rural hinterland.<sup>39</sup> These roads superimposed themselves not only on the natural passages through the Corinthian hinterland, but also responded to long standing and

---

<sup>37</sup> David G. Romano, "City Planning, Centuriation, and Land Division in Roman Corinth: *Colonia Laus Iulia Corinthiensis* & *Colonia Iulia Flavia Augusta Corinthiensis*," in *Corinth: The Centenary, 1896-1996. Corinth XX*, ed. Charles K. Williams and Nancy Bookidis. (Athens: American School of Classical Studies, 2003): 279-301.

<sup>38</sup> Pettegrew, *Isthmus of Corinth*, 148.

<sup>39</sup> Romano, "City Planning, Centuriation, and Land Division."



newly introduced needs of Corinthian residents. The best known of these roads, the diolkos, was long thought to be a drag-way used to transfer ships across the Isthmus which the efforts to cut a canal across the Isthmus rendered useless by the mid-first century. The only preserved and excavated section of this road is on the western side of the Isthmus near the mouth of the 19th century canal. While Pettegrew's work has cast doubt on its use for transferring ships between the gulfs, even once Nero cut this road by the canal, enough of the paved road may have survived to continue to transport cargos and travelers to Isthmia from the harbor near Schinous. This route may have entered the Peloponnesus through the Roman gate of Neronian built into the Byzantine fortress at Isthmia.

Pettegrew cautions against interpretations of the Corinthia that are overly dependent on its situation as a crossroads for east-west and north-south travel through the region.<sup>40</sup> Gebhard and Dickie noted that regional byways such as the Hellenistic road that ran through the long altar at the sanctuary of Poseidon not only reveal the persistence of the city of Corinth as a "central place" in the Corinthia even after its destruction, but also ongoing investments in the infrastructure designed support the rural economy.<sup>41</sup> It is possible that this road linked the sanctuary with the harbor of Kenchreai and perhaps anticipated the road documented in Rife and Korka's recent excavations at Koutsongila.<sup>42</sup> Kenchreai would have likewise stood astride a major north-south corridor linking the "the Skala," which connected the Peloponnesus with the Megarid and Attica along the eastern side of the Isthmus, to roads heading to smaller settlements that dotted the inland valleys and rugged coast of the southeastern Corinthia and the Epidauria and the Argolid beyond. James Wiseman's extensive survey of the Corinthia offers the most comprehensive study of the roads in the region.<sup>43</sup> He traced the major routes that linked to the city of Corinth by a longstanding road that entered the city through the Kraneion gate. This is presumably the road traversed by St. Paul, Lucius, and Philostratus's young philosopher Menippus who met a ghost walking from Corinth to Kenchreai.<sup>44</sup> We have already mentioned the road to Lechaion which is almost certainly of Roman date and would have provided access to the roads that connected connected the northern coast of the Peloponnesus to central Greece. Travelers almost certainly followed earlier roads through the valleys south of the city to the towns of Kleonai, Tenea, Nemea, and the Argolid.

### *Places*

Roads and routes in the Corinthia both linked existing settlements and sites and provided a framework for sites to develop throughout the Roman and the Late Roman period. It is not surprising, for example, that the major Early Christian churches near the city of Corinth stood along longstanding Roman roads. The Skoutela and Kodratos basilica stood near two of the major Roman roads departing the city from the north and the Kraneion basilica takes its name

---

<sup>40</sup> Pettegrew, *Isthmus of Corinth*.

<sup>41</sup> Gebhard and Dickie, "The View from the Isthmus"

<sup>42</sup> Elena Korka and Joseph L. Rife, eds. *On the Edge of a Roman Port: Excavations at Koutsongila, Kenchreai, 2007-2014*. *Hesperia* Supplement 52. (Athens: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2023).

<sup>43</sup> Wiseman, *Land of the Ancient Corinthians*

<sup>44</sup> For St. Paul, see Acts 18:18; for Lucius, see Ap. *Met.* 10.35; Philostrat. *Vita Apollonii*, 4.25.

from its location near the Kraneion district renown for its cemetery and its cynical philosopher.<sup>45</sup> The Kraneion gate connected the city with its eastern hinterland including the sanctuary at Isthmia and Kenchreai.

The territory immediately surrounding the city represented its most productive agricultural lands. As our discussion of centuriation showed, these lands were prepared for distribution to Roman settlers in the hope of generating taxable income for the Roman state. The presence of olives presses cut into the soft limestone of the Isthmus unsurprisingly indicates that olives were being cultivated and processed in the region along side grain and presumably vines for wine making. It seems likely the massive quarries near the modern village of Examilia and around the so-called site of Kromna remained in use during the Roman period,<sup>46</sup> although these areas produced comparatively little Roman pottery suggesting that they did not see intensive activity. Chris Hayward and Robert Pitt have published a series of informal inscriptions from the quarries immediately inland from the harbor at Kenchreai which appear to date to the Roman period.<sup>47</sup> These texts appear to have represented the names of individuals responsible for quarrying limestone perhaps when they completed their work at a particular place. While little is known specifically about the control of these limestone quarries in the Roman period, their location astride major thoroughfares or near the harbor undoubtedly facilitated their exploitation in the Roman period.

Some evidence exists for the presence of Roman villas in the hinterland and these were both working villas as well as the homes of wealthy Roman landowners.<sup>48</sup> These villas, however, were not the self-sufficient villas sometimes imagined for the Roman and particularly the Late Roman west, but rather Villas at the sites of Anaploga and Kokkinovrysi stood immediately west of the city itself astride roads to Phlius with easy access to the coastal plain and the hilly lands around the base of Acrocorinth. Both villas date to the first century, were lavishly decorated with mosaics, and had room to accommodate large scale dining and other functions. The Kokkinovrysi villa featured a large olive press and other features which indicate agricultural processing. On the eastern side of the city at the site of Pano Magoula was a villa that appears to date the third century. It combined luxury appointments including a bath with agricultural processing. The Eastern Korinthia Archaeological Survey also identified at least two potential unexcavated villas in the central Isthmus (see below). Like the excavated examples these seem to

---

<sup>45</sup> William Caraher, "The Ambivalent Landscape of Christian Corinth: the Archaeology of Place, Theology, and Politics in a Late Antique City," in *Corinth in Contrast: Studies in Inequity*, eds. Steven J. Friesen, Sarah A. James, and Daniel N. Schowalter, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 143-165; For citations see: William Caraher, "Church, Society, and the Sacred in Early Christian Greece," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation. Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, 2003, 454-469.

<sup>46</sup> Wiseman, *Land of the Ancient Corinthians*, 64-67; William Caraher, Dimitri Nakassis, and David K. Pettegrew, "Siteless Survey and Intensive Data Collection in an Artifact-rich Environment: Case Studies from the Eastern Corinthia, Greece," *JMA* 19.1 (2007), 7-43 for a critique of Kromna.

<sup>47</sup> Chris Hayward and Robert K. Pitt, "Inscriptions from Limestone Quarries at Kenchreai, Greece," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 204 (2017), 89-96.

<sup>48</sup> For references to villas and a general discussion see: Richard M. Rothaus, "Urban space, agricultural space and villas in late Roman Corinth." *Collection de l'Institut des Sciences et Techniques de l'Antiquité* 508, no. 1 (1994): 391-396; David K. Pettegrew, "Corinthian Suburbia: Patterns of Roman Settlement on the Isthmus," in *Bridge of the Untiring: The Corinthian Isthmus from Prehistory to late Antiquity*, eds. Elizabeth R. Gebhard and Timothy E. Gregory. Hesperia Suppl. XLVIII. Athens: The American School of Classical Studies at Athens (2015), 289-310.

be well appointed as well as situated appropriately along major routes of travel and surrounded by agriculturally productive land.

The roads and routes through the Corinthia offered opportunities for monumental display and commemoration.<sup>49</sup> The monumental gate at Isthmia, the cemeteries associated with Kraneion gate at Kenchreai, the routes extending north from the city of Corinth, the Koutsongila ridge at Kenchreai, and clustered around busy regional crossroads such as Kromna on the central Isthmus. In these places, individual monuments, such as the so-called Cummer tomb near Kenchreai, the large, stepped monument visible on the south side of the Corinth-Isthmia road, and the tomb excavated in the 1930s near the old Examilia railroad station seem to confirm Pausanias's contention that the byways of the Corinthia were festooned with monuments.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, even the route of Nero's ambitious canal excavation was marked by a rock cut relief of Heracles (or perhaps Nero himself) intended, it would seem, to be visible from the route of the canal.<sup>51</sup> It seems probable that other kinds of niches and shrines cut into the soft Corinthian limestone provided opportunities of daily devotional practices in the countryside.

If opportunities for commemoration and displays of piety relied upon and reinforced the visible infrastructure of Roman roads, the less visible infrastructure of Corinthian hydraulic engineering also contributed to the experience of the Corinthian countryside. The Greeks and the Romans cut aqueducts into juncture between the porous limestone cap and the less permeable marl layer beneath.<sup>52</sup> These aqueducts served to capture and distribute water throughout Isthmus and to increase the flow of natural outlets along the Corinthia's many natural marine terraces. The outlets of these springs in the city itself, including the famous outlets at Peirene, the Sacred Spring, and Glauke, and in a line of spring houses and fountains both north and south of the city.<sup>53</sup> The northern side of the city features a string of fountains and modified springs that greeted visitors entering the city, provided water for agricultural production, and formed important focuses of devotional practice. The Fountain of the Lamps, for example, which appears to have been part of a bathing complex dating to Greek times and expanded in the first century, became the focus of religious activity by the sixth century.<sup>54</sup> A deposit of 4000 lamps, some of which evoked angels, suggest that the fountain was the center for votive activity. Another spring and fountain complex near the Sanctuary of Asclepius has less certain religious function, but ritual bathing often accompanied other activities at healing shrines.<sup>55</sup> Fountain houses of various sizes and degrees of almost certainly featured further afield in the Corinthia. Roman period material, for example, appeared near an opening in the aqueduct near the church of Ay. Athanasios on the Isthmus and this suggests a fountain house of some kind. A more dramatic example stood on the coastal plain immediately to the south of the probably route the

---

<sup>49</sup> See Wiseman, *Land of the Ancient Corinthians*, 45-64 for a concise discussion of the routes and monuments; Pettegrew, *Isthmus*, passim.

<sup>50</sup> Paus. 2.4.

<sup>51</sup> Pettegrew, *Isthmus*, 188 and note 90 for further references..

<sup>52</sup> Mark E. Landon, "Beyond Peirene: Toward a Broader View of the Corinthian Water Supply," in *Corinth: The Centenary, 1896-1996. Corinth XX*, ed. Charles K. Williams and Nancy Bookidis. (Athens: American School of Classical Studies, 2003), 43-62.

<sup>53</sup> Landon, "Beyond Peirene," 46-54.

<sup>54</sup> Rothaus, *Corinth*, 126-134.

<sup>55</sup> Rothaus, *Corinth*, 42-54.

coastal road. It was originally constructed in the 1st century and then rebuilt in the 5th or 6th century in a style consistent with the nearby Lechaion basilica.<sup>56</sup> These sites alongside those closer to the city represent the intersection of the visible infrastructure of Roman period roads with the less visible infrastructure of aqueducts.

## The Landscape

The important role that aqueducts played on the Roman landscape of the Corinthia is a salutary reminder that many key aspects of the Roman landscape remain invisible to us today. Intensive pedestrian survey revealed a continuous carpet of Roman artifacts across the region. This not only indicates the intensity of activity across the landscape during the Roman and Late Roman period, but also suggests that we only understand a small fraction of the complexity present in the countryside during this period. As recent research by the Roman Peasant Project has shown for rural Italy, small sites in the countryside reflect a wide range of activities that took place outside of the city including agricultural production, burials, religious rituals, and seasonal pastoralism.<sup>57</sup> For the Isthmus, the Eastern Korinthia Archaeological Survey (EKAS) conducted distributional survey in the eastern chora of the city and in the neighborhood of Isthmia and Kenchreai. While this survey eschewed the notion of sites, it documented a continuous carpet of Roman artifacts in the landscape. These artifacts included millstones, marble revetment as well as ceramic artifacts: transport amphora, table and kitchen wares, and various utility wares common to daily life in domestic and productive settings.<sup>58</sup> EKAS considered any material datable from the 1st century BC to the 8th century AD to be Roman material and artifacts like millstone and marble revetment rarely permit a narrower dating when found in the plow zone. Roman ceramics, especially in the vicinity of well excavated sites, often allow for narrower dating. Pottery datable to the Early Roman pottery, which for EKAS means between 31BC and AD250, was distributed widely in the survey area and appeared in significant quantities around the site of Isthmia and Kenchreai as well as atop a prominent ridge line called Rachi Boska which likely stood near the main road between Corinth and Kenchreai in the central Isthmus. While these clusters of Early Roman material suggest activities associated with the settlements at Kenchreai and Isthmia, the material at Rachi Boska may reflect a villa or even a cluster of farmsteads. Material scattered in lower densities elsewhere in the survey area may reflect lower intensity activities, more episodic uses, or vagaries site formation, visibility, and geology. It is notable that the area associated with Kromna, which saw not only intensive activity in the Greek period, perhaps at least partly associated with quarrying, but also stood near a gate in contemporary Hellenistic Transisthmian wall.<sup>59</sup> The location of this area attracted burials in both the Classical-Hellenistic period and in the Roman period and Pettegrew speculated that perhaps these burials as well as traces of other earlier activities preserved the liminal character of area and discouraged subsequent Roman activity there.

---

<sup>56</sup> Caraher, "Ambivalent Landscape," 150-151.

<sup>57</sup> Kim Bowes, ed., *The Roman Peasant Project: Excavating the Roman Rural Poor*, (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2020).

<sup>58</sup> Pettegrew, *Corinthian Countrysides*.

<sup>59</sup> James R. Wiseman, "A Trans-Isthmian fortification wall." *Hesperia* 32, no. 3 (1963): 248-275.

Indeed, the distribution of Hellenistic and Early Roman material in the countryside of the eastern Corinthia surveyed by EKAS suggests that rural areas remained quite active indeed despite the disruptions associated with the Roman sack of the city in 146BC. In some ways, the distribution of ceramics as well as the construction of a new road that cut through the abandoned sanctuary at Isthmia in the 1st century BC suggests that the Corinthian countryside remained productive, or at very least occupied, even after Mummius's sack. It may be that the Early Roman landscapes reflected both continuities with activity present in the Hellenistic landscape of the Isthmus and the emergence of new Roman patterns of activity rooted in the redistribution of land associated with the centuriation and founding of the Roman colony at Corinth.

## Conclusion

By ending this contribution with a brief survey of the results of EKAS, we conclude with a view of the Roman landscape in the Corinthia that is bustling with activity. Laced with routes that both speak to the transformation of the countryside under Roman rule and continuity with earlier forms of rural settlement, the Isthmus, in particular, represents a dynamic space shaped by both interregional and local movement. Superimposing Roman centuriation and roads atop existing Hellenistic land use, settlements, and religious landscapes formed a spatial analogy for the episodic influx of Roman settlers and activity in the region. The founding of the Roman colony at Corinth, Augustus's investment in the city and its chora, Nero's efforts to build a canal, periodic Flavian interest in Greece, and finally, the early fifth century Theodosian Hexamilion wall, invariably drew new residents and new economic opportunities to the Corinthian countryside. The towns of Kenchreai and Lechaion and the sanctuary of Isthmia with their excavated remains offers some evidence that is suggestive of these episodes. The countryside, in contrast, suggests a space that was persistent and adaptive to needs imposed by long-standing internal forces and periodic external impetus.

In this context, St. Paul on his short trip across the Isthmus to Kenchreai likely encountered a range of shrines, burials, villas, farmsteads, and settlements that reflected recent investments in the region as well as longstanding practices. When at Kenchreai, he would have encountered a booming harbor town of remarkable religious diversity where his famous haircut in fulfillment of a vow would have occurred amid a community familiar with worshipers of Isis, Dionysios, Artemis, Pan, and, undoubtedly, Christianity. Here, he may have encountered merchants, travelers to the sanctuary at Isthmia, abnormally curious donkeys, and local residents whose wealth and position came from the fertile fields of the Isthmus and its regional and interregional connections.