Greek poets and historians, as well as the long Greek oral tradition managed to preserve in the memory of the Greeks the famous legendary city of Iolkos. According to the Greek mythical tradition, Iolkos was the town of Pelias and Aison, father of the one-sandaled Jason, the leader of the Argonautic expedition that united the Argonautes – the most famous representatives of the Mycenaean kingdoms from all over Greece – under a unique aim: the conquest of the golden fleece in the kingdom of Aietes and his daughter, Medeia, or – according to a modern interpretation – the Northeastern outbreak of the Bronze Age World to the rich in copper and gold regions of the Black Sea. This eventual fact along with references to the Mycenaean Iolkos, are described by many Greek authors, and the most significant of them, are listed below in a chronological order.

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1 Generally, about Iolkos, see Realencyclopedie ix, 1853; S. C. Bakhuizen, "Neleia, a contribution to a debate", Orbis terrarium 2, 1996, 85-120, esp. 89-95 and 100-111; J.-C. Decourt and alii, "Thessalia and adjacent regions", in M. H. Hansen & Th. H. Nielsen (eds.), An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis. An Investigation Conducted by the Copenhagen Polis Centre for the Danish National Research Foundation, Oxford 2004, 711.


In the Homeric "Catalogue of the Ships" (B, 712), Iolkos is mentioned as "well-built", while in the Homeric Poems it is called "spacious" and "holder of numerous flocks of sheep".

Even if the Homeric Catalogue of the Ships do not fit perfectly to the actual image of the Mycenaean World, not even the descriptions of Homer, we must accept that those texts embody memories from the Mycenaean Period and give us an idea of the organization of the Thessalian plain during the Mycenaean period.

In the Archaic Period, Hesiod refers again to the "famous" and "spacious" Iolkos.

Later on, the glory of the city still echoes in the Pindaric Odes, where the "adorable" Iolkos, with its "white horses", its "numerous flocks of sheep and oxen" and its "wide open cultivable land", is located in the "small plain" reaching the "foot of Mount Pelion".

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4 Homer, Iliad, B, v. 711-715
Moreover, the tragic poet Euripides denotes "Iolko’s Palaces".

Perhaps the legendary Iolkos progressively lost its importance after the destruction of the Mycenaean Palaces, but its glory and fame still echoes loudly in the poems of the early Hellenistic period. Mention has also been made to the "wealthy" Iolkos in the *Idylles* of Theocritos.

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7 Euripides, *Acestes*, v. 248-249.

The identification of Ancient Iolkos has been ever since a matter of great importance for all the archaeologists who work in the field of Ancient Thessaly\footnote{Cf. Chr. Tsountas, *PAE* 1900, 72-73; *PAE* 1901, 42. D. Theocharis, *PAE* 1956, 119-130; *PAE* 1957, 54-55; *PAE* 1960, 49-59. D. Theocharis, “Iolkos”, *Archaeology* 11, 1958, 13-18. M. Theocharis, “Ek tou nekrotaphieou tes Iolkou”, *AAA* III, 1970, 198-203. G. Chourmouziades & alii, *Magnesia*, 34-35. V. Adrymi-Sismani, "Le palais de Iolkos et sa destruction", *BCH* 128-129, 2004-2005, 1-54. Cf. Mp. Intzesiloglou, "Historiki topographia tes perioches tou kolpou tou Volou (in Greek)", in *La Thessalie. Quinze annees de recherches archeologiques, 1975-1990. Bilans et perspectives. Actes du colloque international Lyon, 17-22 avril 1990*, Athens 1994, 31-56.}. The glory of the legendary city related to the myth of the Argonautes had to be affirmed. It even had to be proved whether it belonged to the territory of myth, or if it constituted a historical event connected to the supernatural efforts of the first Mycenaean sailors to reach the areas beyond the Aegean Sea, a fact already registered by Homer who seems to be an endless source of information for the culture of the Late Helladic and the Early Iron Age periods.\footnote{Cf. recently on this issue, in S. P. Morris & R. Laffineur (eds.), *Epos. Reconstructing Greek Epic and Aegean Bronze Age Archaeology. Proceedings of the 11th International conference, Los Angeles, UCLA – The J. Paul Getty Villa*, 20-23 April 2006, Liège (*Aegaeum* 28) 2007.} However, since it is obvious that the Homeric texts do not consist secure proofs for the identification of the Mycenaean settlements, and since a divergence is realised between reality and epic tradition, the only thing left to do is to consult the actual well known excavation data and survey results, which consist the only secure evidence that provides us with an image of the organisation of the Mycenaean.
settlements in the coastal Mycenaean Thessaly; in particular, of those located around the natural harbour of the Pagasetic Gulf.

However, the latest excavations and surveys conducted in North-Eastern Thessaly helped us to locate more than a 100 new Mycenaean settlements in Thessaly, who testify that Thessaly was belonging to the Mycenaean periphery and maybe constituted the Northern centre of the Mycenaean World. Meanwhile, our knowledge about the presence of the Mycenaeans in Thessaly has been significantly increased by the excavations that took part during the last century in the wider area of Volos, around the inlet of the Pagasetic Gulf.

More thoroughly, the first finds that could be associated with the legendary Iolkos have been located in that area at the beginning of the 20th century, after the excavation of the two large scale tholos tombs in Dimini (fig. 1, 2) and later of a third one in Kapakli close to the Kastro of Volos, where for the first time Tsountas located the legendary Iolkos. Half a century later, D. Theocharis excavated a settlement in Kastro of Volos (Palia) situated very close to Kapakli, at the entrance of the modern town of Volos, at a small distance from the sea. There, he revealed parts of buildings of the 15th and 14th cent. B.C. ruined from a powerful fire. One of those buildings was identified by the excavator with the legendary Palace of Iolkos. Moreover, all scholars have interpreted the coastal Mycenaean settlement of Pevkakia – neighboring to Kastro of Volos – as the protected harbor of Ancient Iolkos, the well known Neleia. In addition, the most significant Mycenaean ruins in

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19 Cf. the articles of Chr. Tsountas, in *supra*, n. 12.


21 Cf. S. C. Bakhuizen (*supra*, n. 1), 85-120.
the inlet of the Pagasetic Gulf were recently uncovered in Dimini by the excavations conducted during the last 20 years.

To be more explicit, a Mycenaean town was excavated in Dimini\(^{22}\) (fig. 3), lying on the plain situated east of the hill with the Neolithic remains. This town, that covers an area of about 10 hectares, was founded in the end of the 15\(^{th}\) c. B.C., on the top of earlier EBA and MBA deposits\(^{23}\), and flourished in the 14\(^{th}\) and 13\(^{th}\) c. B.C., the period of expansion of the Mycenaean civilization. Eleven blocks of houses were excavated, built in two main architectural phases, in the 14\(^{th}\) and 13th cent. B.C. (fig. 4). These houses that consist of 2 to 3 rooms are aligned along the central road\(^{24}\), which strikingly enough does not provide access to them. They have stone foundations, a mud-brick superstructure, coloured (white and ochre) plasters, while clay baths and traces of drainage systems are also uncovered in many of them. They are independent to each other, sharing courtyards with wells. A painted clay figurine of a bovine\(^{25}\) (fig. 5) found in one of those houses suggests the presence of a domestic shrine. Additionally, a large ceramic kiln was uncovered in the outskirts of the town\(^{26}\). Systematic excavations conducted during the last five years unearthed a building complex of great importance in the centre of this settlement, with two Megaron-type, parallel buildings, named Megaron A and Megaron B, surrounded by wings of storage areas and workshops\(^{27}\). This is actually the complex where the central road of the settlement - 4,5m wide - leads to. This road crosses a wider road that leads to the harbour, at Pevkakia (Neleia). In the crossroad of these two main streets, a large *propylon*\(^{28}\) with two lateral rooms is placed, providing access into the two large Megara and the surrounding architectural complex.

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23 V. Adrymi-Sismani, "Dimini in the Middle Bronze Age (in Greek)", in *Proceedings of the "Messoeladika. Continental Greece in the Middle Bronze Age" International Colloquium, held by the French Archaeological Institute, the American School of Classical Studies and the Nederladen Institute of Athens, Athens 8-12 mars 2006*. In press.


25 V. Adrymi-Sismani (*supra*, n. 22), 217-219, fig. 164.


27 V. Adrymi-Sismani, "Le palais de Iolkos" (*supra*, n. 12), 8-51 et fig. 2.

After crossing the propylon, the entrance to the complex is attained via a bounded court, a construction of 4 small rooms, perhaps guardrooms and a large ramp that leads to Megaron A.

The space occupied by this Megaron consists of 5 parallel wings of rooms, while its core - the actual Megaron A - bears two wings of rooms divided by a long corridor (fig. 6) and is outlined by three wings of smaller storage rooms. Megaron A was constructed in the 13th cent. B.C., over an earlier Megaron, dating back to the 14th c. B.C. which was destroyed by fire. The north wing of Megaron A has two large rooms and a prostoon, all with floors and walls covered with white lime plaster as well as an open peristyle court with columns covered also with white lime plaster. The roof of the probably two-storeyed Megaron A was pitched and perhaps covered by clay tiles, while parts of a clay drain pipe and a large clay funnel were also brought to light.

The south wing, contemporary with the north one, consists of ten small rooms (fig. 7). The rooms were used for the preparation and the storage of food as is evident from the pottery finds (rooms 4-5), and also for the small scale manufacture of artefacts (rooms 9, 19, 18, 17). Apart from the pottery finds, 10 moulds (fig. 8) and the necessary tools for the manufacture of jewels were found. However, the most significant find in this wing, where the workshops were situated, was part of an inscribed stone weight in Linear B (fig. 9), which suggests that Linear B was in use in Megaron A.

South of Megaron A, there is a wing of workshops, where an intact large lead vessel was found. Another wing of storerooms was excavated north of Megaron A.

The second building complex, named Megaron B, was founded over earlier deposits nearby Megaron A and provided access to it through an inner court. It also consists of two wings: one with a central building with 3 rooms made of thick masonry - more than one meter wide -, and another one that consists of storage rooms.

Megaron B was destroyed by an intense fire (fig. 10). The extended and thick layer of destruction - that consists of carbonized wood, burnt mud bricks and burnt clay - remained undisturbed until the moment of excavation.

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29 Ibid., 22-23, fig. 12-16.
and lies over a significant quantity of pottery that bears traces of fire. A large collar necked jar\textsuperscript{32} broken into pieces due to the collapse of the wooden roof was found in room 3. In the same room, a large lead vessel\textsuperscript{33}, melted due to the severe fire and a large Aeginetan tripod cooking pot\textsuperscript{34} broken and totally burnt give both the impression that they were pulled over, towards the door. This probably happened during the time of destruction so that the vessels would be taken away, an act that remained unachieved. Also, many large parts of wooden beams were found, that fell when the roof collapsed\textsuperscript{35}. In the storage room 6, 5 large pithoi containing cereal, which had been placed in the ground\textsuperscript{36}, had already been taken away, a fact that suggests that there was enough time in order to try to remove them before the actual destruction. In the other two storerooms, a large quantity of vases (fig. 11) made especially for liquids was found placed on shelves and - as the analyses undertaken in Bristol revealed - they hadn’t been used. In the same room decorated and plain pottery was also found\textsuperscript{37}, including a large Canaanite amphora used for wine bearing the potter’s mark and a large unpainted stirrup jar used for oil. Also, a decorated rhyton\textsuperscript{38} and the part of an ivory comb were found in the same storeroom (fig. 12), along with wooden trunks, straw baskets, large jars, amphoras and the specially paved area used for the storage of fruits, as the carbonized seeds of olive trees and grapes demonstrate.

In the eastern room of the central building of Megaron B a large clay H-shaped altar (fig. 13) was found\textsuperscript{39}. The entire construction bears intensive traces of fire and different layers possibly with burnt liquids. An intact large painted mug\textsuperscript{40} found in front of the altar, indicates that libations might have been taking place on it. The same thing is indicated by the cups containing remains of burnt animal bones that were uncovered in the 3 small side rooms, where a small entrance leads to\textsuperscript{41}.

\textsuperscript{32} V. Adrymi-Sismani, "Le palais de Iolkos" (supra, n. 12), 38, fig. 24. Cf. S. Iakovidis, Perate. To Nekrotapheio (in Greek), 1969, pl. 76c; C. Renfrew, The Archaeology of Cult: The Sanctuary at Phylakopi (ABSA Suppl. 18), 1985, 86; P. A. Mountjoy, Grapte Mykenaike Keramike (in Greek), Athens (Kardamitsas) 1994, 144-145.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.\textsuperscript{32}, 42.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 42 and fig. 27-28.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 42.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 48.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 48-50, fig. 35-37.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 46-47, fig. 34. Cf. P.A. Mountjoy, Regional Mycenaean Decorated Pottery, Berlin (M. Leidorf) 1999, 674-675.

\textsuperscript{39} V. Adrymi-Sismani, "Le palais de Iolkos" (supra, n. 12), 39-41, fig. 25.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 40, fig. 26.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 40.
At the end of the 12th cent. B.C., Megaron A and B were affected by a destruction, similarly to the other well known Mycenaean centres of Southern Greece, such as Mycenes, Tiryns, Midea, Pylos and Thebes. The Mycenaean town of Dimini before the destruction, at the end of the 13th. cent. B.C., presented in general a good urban organisation that does not seem to differ from that of the Mycenaean centres of Southern Greece. Of course, certain small differences are observed, but a similar clear intention to demonstrate the social rank is noticeable. The latter is accomplished through the construction of the two large scale tholos tombs and mainly through the construction of a large architectural complex constituting a combination of habitation spaces, storage areas, workshops and sacred spaces, and where Linear B script was in use. Consequently, in the Mycenaean settlement of Dimini we find the unique example of a well-built Mycenaean town in Thessaly with "well constructed roads", organised around an administrative, economic and religious centre, which at the end of the 12th cent. B.C. experiences a horrible destruction. Nevertheless, the settlement is not abandoned immediately after the destruction. There are remarkable signs that during the next two decades there is an attempt for repair and renovation of all buildings of the settlement, in at least two habitation phases (fig. 14). What’s more, we should stress that after the repairs we do not observe any changes in the urban plan of the settlement, which in general remains the same.

The population that attempts these changes appears to be basically the same, since it uses the same pottery at the same time with the grey pseudo-minyan and the handmade burnished ware that appear here for the first time now, and it continues cultivating the same land with cereal, vines, and olives, and breed the same domestic animals. However it is obvious that we are now speaking of a completely different, clearly rural, society. The workshops, where the stone moulds were found, are not in use and the precious imported objects are absent. It appears that there is also an important change in the religious sector, since Megaron B, where the large altar existed, remains buried under the ruins.

43 Cf. supra, n. 17.
44 V. Adrymi-Sismani, "Habitation changes in the Eastern coastal Thessaly, following the destruction of the Palaces in LH III B2 / LH IIIC Early", in Papers of the International Symposium "The Dark Ages Revisited", in memoriam of J. Coulson", Volos (University of Thessaly), June 2007 (under publication).
Unfortunately this new configuration could not have lasted for long, and very soon, in the beginning of LH III C middle, the residents abandoned their cultivable land permanently and moved to another, more secure region. We could speak of a mass immigration, perhaps in familial groups, either on foot – which implicates a close destination – or by boats, fact that means that they resorted to a completely different region, perhaps towards the islands or the coasts of Asia Minor. This situation led to the final abandonment of Dimini for many centuries. It should be marked out that the settlement’s abandonment was carried out peacefully\(^{46}\), without any previous sign of intervention of an exterior threat that would confirm the later Greek tradition of the Dorian invasion.

The phenomenon of the destruction that occurred in the settlement of Dimini was also experienced by the neighbouring settlements in Kastro of Volos and in Pefkakia (fig. 15). However, those two settlements do not appear to have faced the destruction with the same way that was faced by the inhabitants of Dimini. According to the excavators, the settlement in Pefkakia is depopulated immediately after the destruction, without any effort for repair of the destroyed buildings\(^{47}\). On the contrary, in the settlement in Kastro of Volos life goes on and the transition to the Early Iron Age is attained smoothly\(^{48}\). However many changes took place there after the destruction. The "crater of the warriors" rather suggests a new society of martial sovereigns that dominates the harbour and the plain of Volos. The well-known, so far, archaeological data from Kastro Volos do not suggest that the population from Pefkakia or from Dimini resorted there, since there are no architectural finds dating to that period.

The image of the power and wealth of the northern centre of the Mycenaean civilization – Iolkos – before its destruction was reinforced lately by the recent excavation in 2004, in Kasanaki located in the Volos area, of an intact tholos tomb\(^{49}\) also associated with Iolkos. Kasanaki’s tholos tomb, that dates in the 15\(^{th}\) and 14\(^{th}\) cent. B.C., is of great importance, since it gives as useful information about the burial customs of this area.

\(^{46}\) Cf. V. Adrymi-Sismani, "Le palais de Iolkos", 1-54.


\(^{48}\) A. Efistathiou-Batziou, \(He Hysreri epoche tou chalkou sten perioche tes Magnesias: To KAstro (Palai) kai ta Pefkakia, Volos (unpublished PhD), 59-70.

Seven deceased (4 adults and 3 children) had been buried in the tholos tomb, accompanied by decorated pottery, golden, glass and faience jewellery, one sword, golden and glass plaques, seal stones made of agate and rock crystal, clay figurines (kourotrophos), and golden sheets bearing holes belonging probably to the decoration of the deceased’s clothes or shroud. Long after their initial burial, the deceased were burnt all together, during a ceremonial fire, and their vestiges were placed again into the tholos tomb without any order. Similar funeral customs are observed in the contemporary Kapakli and Dimini A tholos tombs.

The similarities of the four tholos tombs finds and of the architectural features are not surprising, since these tombs are located around the inlet of the Pagasetic gulf along with the Late Bronze Age settlements of Kastro Volos, Dimini and Pefkakia (fig. 16). According to our latest considerations, all these three settlements – Dimini, Kastro of Volos and Pefkakia – actually belong together to the legendary centre of Ancient Iolkos. They function together around the biggest port of Thessaly in order to control the exchanges of the Thessalian plain products and generally all the maritime communications via the Aegean with the rest of the well known world. This port of Iolkos was located around a deep Iolka (word used by Hesychius to describe the marine passage)\textsuperscript{50} shaped in the inlet of the Pagasetic Gulf during the 3\textsuperscript{rd} millennium B.C., according to the geological research of Zannger\textsuperscript{51}.

However, from the three coastal Mycenaean settlements located in the inlet of the Pagasetic Gulf, only Dimini makes a real candidate, since it displays clearly the role of a town with an administrative, economic and religious centre, important workshops and use of the Linear B script that testify the existence of a powerful and wealthy centre. The inhabitants of these settlements were keen sailors that had developed sailing from a very early period, as is indicated by the early representations of ships that were depicted on their vases (fig. 17). The first ships, the first long voyages and the adventures of those pioneer sailors of Ancient Iolkos generated the legend of the Argonautic expedition, which must be placed within the Mycenaean times, one generation before the expedition to Troy, judging by the genealogy of the heroes that took part in both expeditions.

Moreover, the material’s analysis of the golden items of the Kasanaki tholos tomb – that was made in the Laboratories of the Museum of Louvre in Paris in order to identify the source of the gold used for the fabrication of the jewellery of the deceased – has revealed that this gold is of an alluvial type,

\textsuperscript{50} Hesychius, s.v. Ιώλκα.

meaning that it comes from a river’s deposits. We hope that future analysis will display if this gold can actually be associated with the rich in precious metals and gold sources in the region of the Ancient Colchis where the kingdom of Aetes was placed, and perhaps in river Phasis, where even recently chips of gold seem to be selected with sheepskins. This would be an ideal and desirable conclusion that could bring in our times Iolkos and the Argonautic Expedition from their mythical perspective to a historical reconsideration.

52 M. F. Guerra, S. Röhrs, J. Salomon, Ph. Walter, V. Adrymi-Sismani, "L’origine de l’or de la tombe mycénienne de Kasanaki", in Proceedings of the Conference "To archaeologiko Ergo ste Thessalia kai Sterea Ellada II, Volos (University of Thessaly) 2006" (under publication).
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LH III C Middle, phase a

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