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Sanctuaries and cult places from the Roman conquest to Late Antiquity: a survey of recent work in Achaëa, Epirus and the islands

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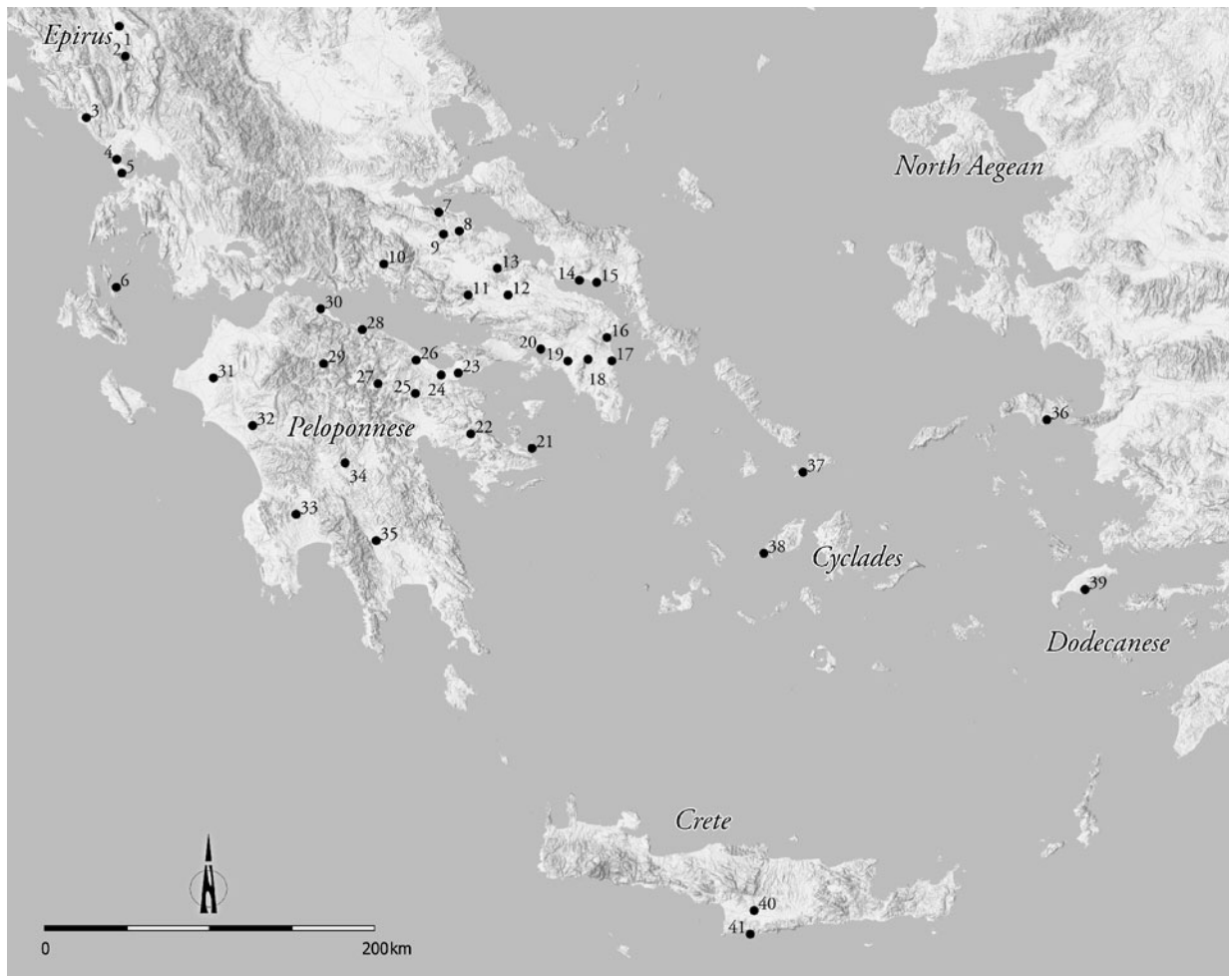
This paper surveys archaeological work on Greek sanctuaries of the Roman period conducted over the past 20 years. Previously largely ignored or simply overlooked, in recent times the Roman phases of sanctuaries have seen a tremendous amount of excavation and research work, mirroring the increased interest in the archaeology of Roman Greece as a whole. In addition to brief presentations of new and recent archaeological discoveries and material studies, this survey also aims to highlight the importance of current work based on the re-examination of sites excavated long ago and the contribution of various strands of archaeological evidence to an enhanced understanding of the history and function of Greek sanctuaries from the time of the Roman conquest to Late Antiquity.

Introduction

Sanctuaries have been a prime focus of exploration and study since the early days of archaeology in Greece. Their history and material remains reflect complex and long sequences of activity, but until recently archaeological research, with a few exceptions, has tended to underplay or overlook material remains of the Roman period and Late Antiquity. Over the last decades, this picture has begun to change thanks to a shift in research interests and greater attention now being displayed towards periods of the Greek past that were until recently rather neglected. There has also been an increased awareness that sanctuaries and cult places are sensitive markers of broader processes reflecting Greece's conquest and integration into the Roman Empire (Galli 2013; Melfi and Bobou 2016) and the transformations following the rise of Christianity (for example, Sweetman 2010; 2015). Central to this realization has been the need to reconsider understudied finds and monuments, reappraise old excavation records and re-examine little known 'legacy data'. This, in turn, has resulted in a plethora of new information and approaches to the character and changing material record of Greek sanctuaries and cult places during their 'late' phases of existence.

The purpose of the present report is to address these developments by highlighting important archaeological work that has taken place over the last 20 years. From a chronological point of view, the report covers evidence from the time of the Roman conquest (second to early first century BC) through the Roman Imperial period (Early Roman: later first century BC to early second century AD; Middle Roman: mid-second to late third century AD) to Late Antiquity (here taken to encompass the fourth to the seventh century AD). The geographical focus lies on the southern and western areas of the Greek mainland, which in Roman times were part of the provinces of Achaëa and Epirus, and the Aegean and Ionian islands, including Crete (**Map 9**). The thematic focus is accordingly wide, covering research concentrating not only on the major Panhellenic sanctuaries but also on peripheral and, sometimes, less well-known sites, including regional cult centres, cult places in rural and urban areas, as well as evidence for domestic shrines and private religion.

Despite the wide scope, such a survey is unavoidably selective. The discussion concentrates on five key themes, each with different chronological and geographical emphases. In the first part, I consider new evidence for continuities and breaks, highlighting the fate of Greek sanctuaries during the time of the Roman conquest and their state in the post-conquest era. In the second part, the focus lies on temple architecture,



Map 9. Sites referred to in the text. 1. Rodotopi; 2. Dodona; 3. Mesopotamos; 4. Nikopolis; 5. Actium; 6. Vathy, Ithaca; 7. Daphnous; 8. Atalanti; 9. Kalapodi; 10. Delphi; 11. Valley of the Muses; 12. Thebes; 13. Ptoon/Kastraki; 14. Eretria; 15. Amarynthos; 16. Brexiza, Marathon; 17. Loutsia; 18. Glyka Nera; 19. Athens; 20. Eleusis; 21. Kalauraia; 22. Epidaurous; 23. Isthmia; 24. Corinth; 25. Nemea; 26. Sikyon; 27. Stymphalos; 28. Aigeira; 29. Lousoi; 30. Aigion; 31. Elis; 32. Olympia; 33. Messene; 34. Arachamitai; 35. Amyklai; 36. Samos, Heraion; 37. Delos; 38. Despotiko; 39. Kardamaina; 40. Gortyn; 41. Lebena. © BSA.

especially recent discoveries of new temples and the study of the Roman architectural phases of pre-existing cult buildings. The third part is devoted to highlighting new discoveries and work on sanctuary infrastructure, while the fourth deals with various cult places in urban, rural and domestic contexts. In the fifth part, the focus shifts to recent research on the changing character of Greek sanctuaries during Late Antiquity.

Sanctuaries in ruins?

Ancient literary sources are replete with references of damage to sanctuaries during the Roman conquest and the post-conquest period, between the second quarter of the second to about the middle of the first century BC. In modern times, destructions observed in the archaeological record of this period have been frequently attributed to the Romans. An important publication on the acropolis sanctuary at **Stymphalos (ID112)** throws new light on this matter through the study of the numerous projectile weapons found there (Hagerman 2014; Schaus 2014). Similar material had been previously noted from a number of Greek sites, as for instance at **Mesopotamos**, traditionally identified with the Nekromanteion. A violent destruction by fire during the Roman conquest of Epirus in 167 BC was posited by Sotirios Dakaris in the 1960s

(Dakaris 1963: 92), followed by a phase in the first century BC during which the function of the site changed to become residential. While the destruction by the Romans has never been called into question, the site's original function has been at the centre of a long-standing debate, with opinions split between those who accept its identification as an oracular cult centre (Gravani and Katsikoudis 2018) and those who prefer to see it as a fortified farmstead controlling a strategic entrance from the harbour of Glykys limen to the Thesprotian hinterland (for example, Baatz 1999). The latter interpretation has gained ground in recent years, following a reappraisal of the military equipment found at the Nekromanteion as part of the *Thesprotia Expedition* undertaken by the Finnish Institute at Athens and in the light of similar finds from other sites of the conquest period (**ID460**, **ID815**, **ID1685**) and the evidence for destructions from other fortified sites in the region (Forsén 2019). A recent study of the archaeobotanical assemblage from the Nekromanteion, highlighting similarities in subsistence, processing and storage practices to other rural sites of the Late Hellenistic period in the region, seems to lend further weight to this interpretation (Gkatzoyia 2018).

The termination of ritual practices or interruption of cult activity in the aftermath of such episodes has been noted at several sanctuaries during the post-conquest period. Destruction in the early part of the first century BC, followed by complete cessation of activity, has been posited for the recently discovered sanctuary of Asklepios at **Daphnous (ID2714)**. There is little doubt that during this time Greek sanctuaries suffered violently during various episodes of conflict. L. Cornelius Sulla's plundering actions in **Delphi**, **Olympia** and **Epidauros**, as related in ancient literary sources (Plut. *Sull.* 12.4–5), have received much attention, as have the destructions wrought by the Mithridatic forces on **Delos**. At the sanctuaries of Apollo Maleatas and Asklepios at **Epidauros**, a long gap until the Hadrianic period has been noted following destructions during the early first century BC that apparently encompassed buildings and infrastructure that were central to the performance of cult (Melfi 2010). **Dodona** is mentioned in the literary sources as a site where pillage by marauding Thracians fighting under Mithridates VI Eupator took place (Cass. Dio 30–35.101.2). No destruction related to this event has been confirmed archaeologically, but the paucity of relevant finds from throughout the entire first century BC and into the Early Imperial period begs the question. Still, even the little surviving evidence suggests that the oracle continued to function after 88 BC and that the temenos of Zeus became the epicentre of dedications to the imperial family during the Augustan period (Piccinini 2013).

Apparent gaps in the archaeological record of sanctuaries during the Early Roman period always need to be approached critically, especially when explanations are based on arguments based on silence or little-understood evidence. At the sanctuary of **Kalapodi**, excavations by the DAI have led to an important discovery concerning a building constructed on top of the so-called Archaic South Temple (**Fig. 145**). Previously thought to be part of a post-Justinianic fortification, it has now become clear that this is an Early Roman temple (**ID8989**; Felsch 2007: 23–24). More recent campaigns have brought to light another, until now unknown, building with several phases of use during the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods (**ID6784**). Less clear conclusions can be drawn from the current state of knowledge about Roman activity at the temple and in the sanctuary of Zeus in **Nemea (ID1880)**, which is generally believed to have stopped functioning as a cult place and a centre for athletic contests before the Roman period (for a contrasting view, see Gutsfeld and Lehmann 2005). A series of trenches on the south side of the site dated to the first century BC has furnished evidence for vineyard planting, suggesting that by this time the sanctuary had been given over to agricultural exploitation (Miller 2015: 298). More recent excavations have brought to light an unusual deposit of lamps of second- to third-century AD date from a long-disused reservoir on the east side of the Heroön (Miller 2015: 299–300). Although none bears traces of burning, their use in cult activity (not necessarily related to previous practice), as suggested by the excavator, cannot be ruled out.

Building activity, epigraphic dedications or statuary are not the only and perhaps sometimes not even the best types of evidence for the survival (or revival) of cult. Much recent work underlines the importance of integrating the results of finds analyses, including archaeobotanical and archaeozoological studies, as has been done, for example, at the sanctuary of Poseidon in **Kalaureia** on the island of Poros. Among the features documented in recent excavations by the SIA was a cistern with a use-life spanning the period



145. Kalapodi: aerial view of the excavation area during site management works in 2020, with the Roman temple upper left. © DAI (D-DAI-ATH-2020-1555; photo: Stefan Biernath).

ca. 50 BC to AD 100 (ID118; Wells *et al.* 2007: 89–94). Analysis of the faunal remains from the cistern fill concluded that a large number belonged to snakes and lizards; this is an unexpected and as yet unparalleled find, associated with the use (including possible consumption) and ritual deposition of such animals at the sanctuary (Mylona 2013; Lymberakis and Iliopoulos 2019). At the sanctuary of Artemis Lykoatis near **Arachamitai** (ID3257), despite a destruction of the cult centre dated to ca. 30 BC, cult continuity into the beginning of the third century AD is indicated by concentrations of pottery, lamps, other votives and animal bones in the area of the Hellenistic altar (Forsén 2017). Furthermore, recent work conducted by the ÖAI at **Lousoi** has revealed significant evidence for building and ritual activity during the Early and Middle Roman periods, documented in several cult buildings at the civic centre and at the sanctuary of Artemis (ID874, ID308, ID8869). Of special interest here is the evidence for ritual dining consisting of assemblages of pottery, glass vessels and animal bones in the area of the Hellenistic peripteral temple, the altar and the east building in the sanctuary of Artemis, which spans the entire period from the first century BC to the third century AD (Fig. 146; Schauer 2017).



146. Lousoi: Orthostate Building with altar. © ÖAI.



147. Olympia: sanctuary of Eileithyia. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports: Ephorate of Antiquities of Ilia.

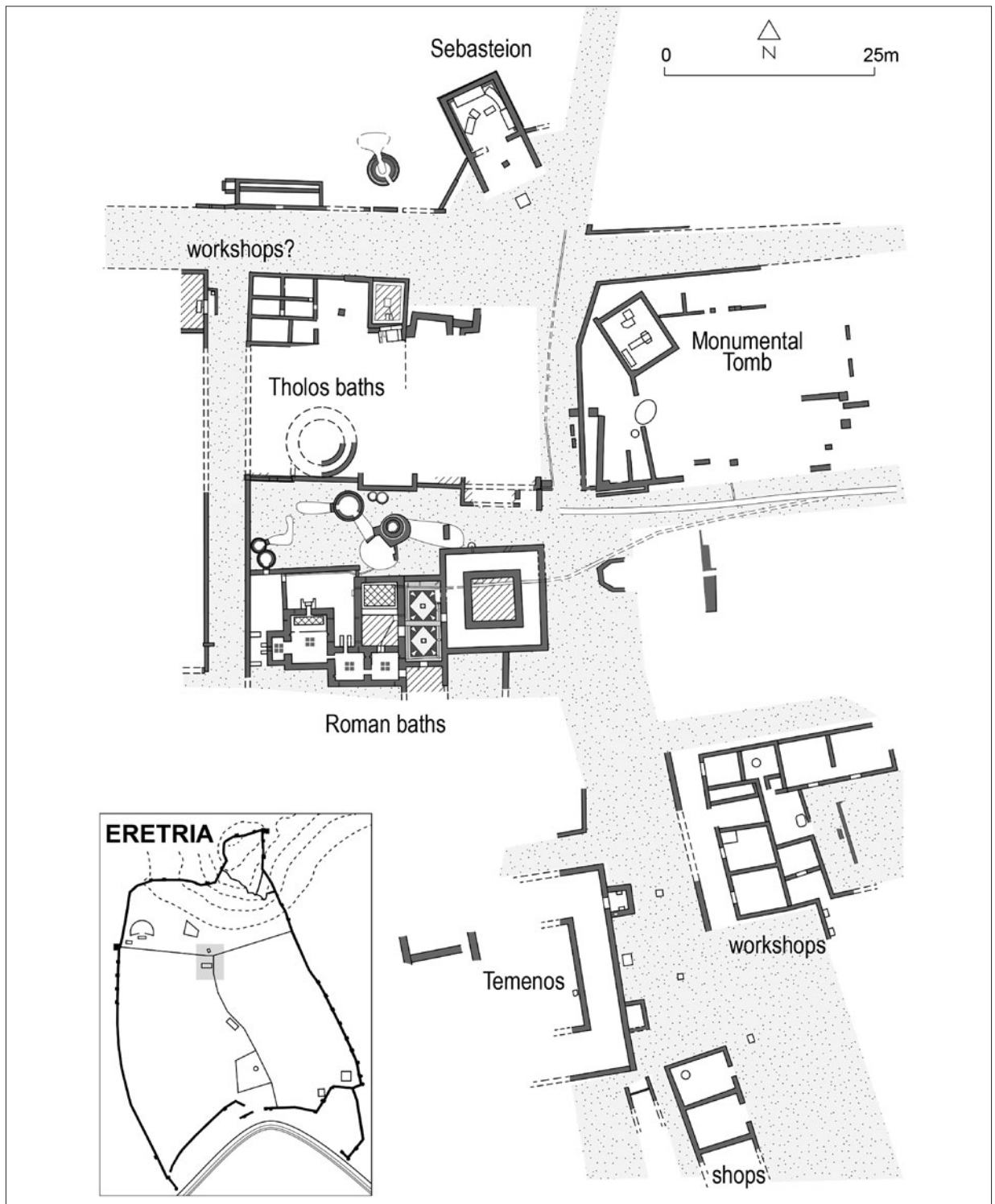
Temples and cult buildings

The archaeology of cult buildings, particularly as regards their architecture, form and function, has seen new discoveries and re-examination of older material over the course of the last 20 years. To a significant extent, this material concerns buildings with origins going back to before the Roman period but which during Imperial times underwent rearrangements, repairs or modifications in order to accommodate the changing needs of the communities that used them. Several projects are ongoing excavations or include Roman discoveries that are still under study, such as, for example, the temple excavated in recent years by the ASA/University of Thessaly at **Sikyon** (ID6126) that was presumably built in the Late Classical/Early Hellenistic period (Lolos 2016). Work by the ASA at the sanctuary of Isis in **Messene** has furnished evidence for Late Roman interventions (ID6527, ID6528, ID6892; Spathi 2020: fig. 134), while intensive use of the cult building and altar during Roman times has come to light at the sanctuary of Eileithyia in **Olympia** during work undertaken by the by EPCA of Ilia (ID11650; Fig. 147). Roman interventions are also attested at the Hellenistic naiskoi in front of the theatre at **Aigeira**, excavated by the ÖAI in recent decades. The architecture of these temples has been the subject of a new study as part of a doctoral dissertation by Alexandra Tanner (for preliminary results, see Tanner 2020).

Two sites that have already offered important new evidence through ongoing study are worth mentioning in this context. At **Eretria**, excavations by ESAG in 1999 and 2000 (ID11465, ID11360) led to the discovery of a temple identified as the Sebasteion (Fig. 148). This was a Hellenistic building, presumably already dedicated to a ruler cult, that was enlarged and modified perhaps as early as the Augustan period to house the cult of the Roman emperors. Of particular interest is a series of pedestals for the display of statues discovered in the inner room. A study by Stephan G. Schmid (2001) suggests at least four phases of arrangements of galleries for statues of various sizes, numerous fragments of which were found in the temple.

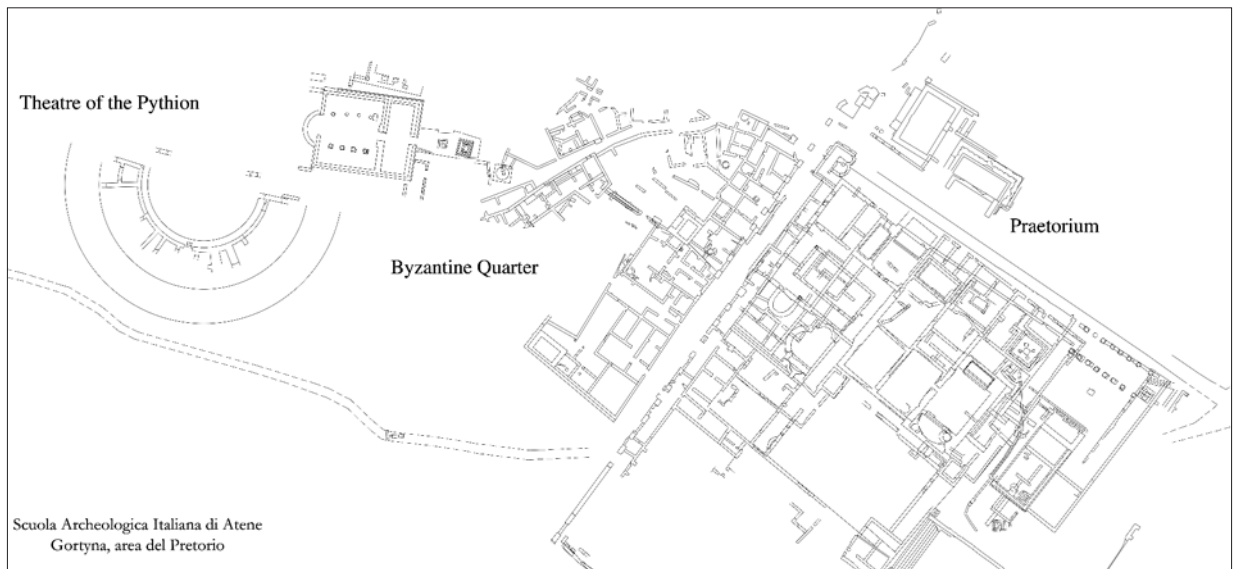
An important investigation by Lorenzo Mancini has thrown new light onto the dating and building phases of the temple attributed to Zeus Areios at **Rodotopi** in the region of Ioannina. Based on a detailed re-examination of the standing remains and the architectural fragments recovered during excavations in the early 1950s, Mancini has argued that the Ionic peripteral temple belongs to a monumental remodelling that took place in the Augustan period, presumably in connection with the installation of a cult of a Roman ruler as *synnaos theos* (Mancini 2018). This hypothesis, together with evidence for the cult of Artemis Hegemone (Pliakou 2018), radically changes our perception of this important Molossian sanctuary and generates questions about its function and history in the Roman period.

The Roman phases of two Cretan sanctuaries and their temples, constructed long before the Roman period, have also been the subject of fieldwork and analysis. In 2007, a comprehensive study on the sanctuary of Asklepios at **Lebena** appeared; this is, in effect, the long-overdue final publication of excavations undertaken by SAIA in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Melfi 2007). Unfortunately, the excavation records of the 1910–1912 campaigns that focused on the temple of Asklepios are lost. Nevertheless, Milena Melfi, based on careful observations of the building remains and epigraphic evidence, has proposed a



148. Eretria: sector E/600/NW, with Sebasteion centre-top. © ESAG.

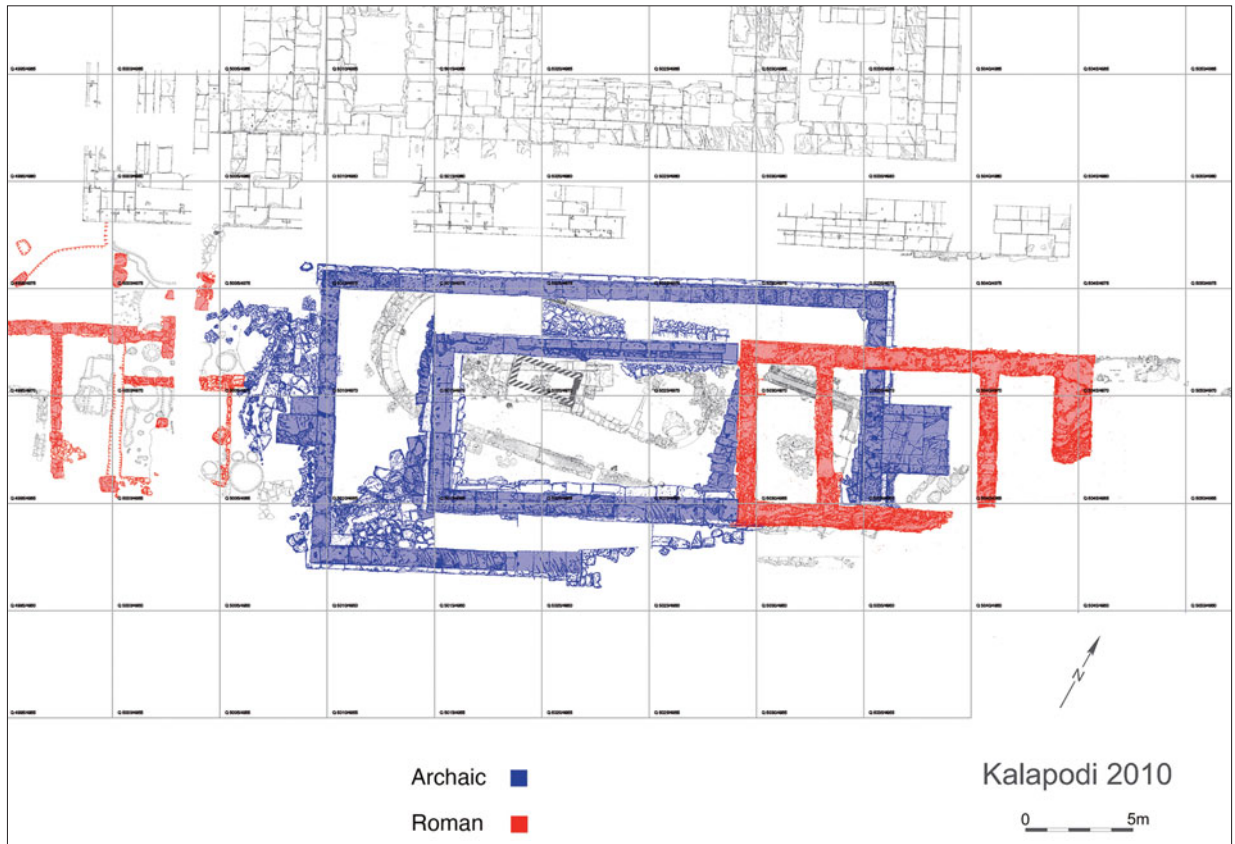
phasing scheme of several interventions attested from the Julio-Claudian to the Severan period. Major monumentalization of the temple took place between AD 160 and 180 during an extensive programme of architectural renovation of the entire sanctuary, while further embellishment of the temple, perhaps as a result of imperial intervention, is attested in the early third century AD.



149. Gortyn: sanctuary of Apollo Pythios and the Byzantine Quarter. © Archivi SAIA, NIG 8337.

The sanctuary lay within the territory of the provincial capital **Gortyn**, and Melfi points out similarities in terms of its monumentalization with that of the temple of Apollo Pythios (2007: 88–95). The latter has been at the centre of a programme of trial trenching and architectural study by the SAIA/University of Padova, concentrating on areas of stratigraphy left untouched by the 19th-century excavations (**Fig. 149**; Bonetto *et al.* 2020). This research has clarified several aspects of the Late Hellenistic and Roman phases of the temple. For instance, it has been confirmed on stratigraphic grounds that a major remodelling of the temple took place in the Severan period, as had been suggested previously based on epigraphic evidence. This work has taken place in tandem with new excavations and a detailed re-examination of the adjacent theatre (**ID2818**) and the sprawling urban quarter of Roman and Early Byzantine date between the theatre and the Praetorium (**ID203**, **ID1915**, **ID2820**, **ID9904**). This has showed that the sanctuary became the epicentre of further urban development in subsequent centuries. In this area, investigations by the SAIA/University of Siena between 2002 and 2007 have revealed evidence for another building of possible cultic nature, the date of which is placed between the second and third century AD (**ID780**).

A further example highlighting the importance of revisiting old material is the temple of Apollo at **Actium**. According to literary sources, this temple was dedicated by Augustus following his victory against M. Antonius at the eponymous sea battle in 31 BC (Suet. *Aug.* 2.18.2; Cass. Dio 51.1.2). Although partly excavated in 1867 by Charles-François-Noël Champoiseau, for more than a century this highly symbolic monument failed to attract attention and its location was almost forgotten, until excavations were resumed by the University of Ioannina in 2003. According to the preliminary results of an architectural study by Yannis Smiris, the Augustan building was founded entirely on a pre-existing temple constructed in the Archaic period and refurbished in the second century BC. Raised on a podium, the temple is reconstructed as a prostyle (tetrastyle) building with a pronaos featuring two additional columns fronting each *anta* and an oblong cella measuring 24.15m × 9.2m in plan (**ID796**; see, more recently, Trianti and Smiris 2018). The walls were built in *opus quasi-reticulatum*, but several parts of the masonry employ *opus testaceum*, which suggests repairs belonging to more than one phase. At the far end of the cella, excavations documented a rectangular socle built in *opus quasi-reticulatum*, which in a later phase was replaced by another monumental pedestal furnished with three steps built in *opus testaceum*. In 2009, excavation between these two features brought to light several sculptures, including two over-life-sized heads of Late Hellenistic and Augustan date that have been interpreted as belonging to cult images (**ID1645**; Trianti 2016; Trianti and Smiris 2018).

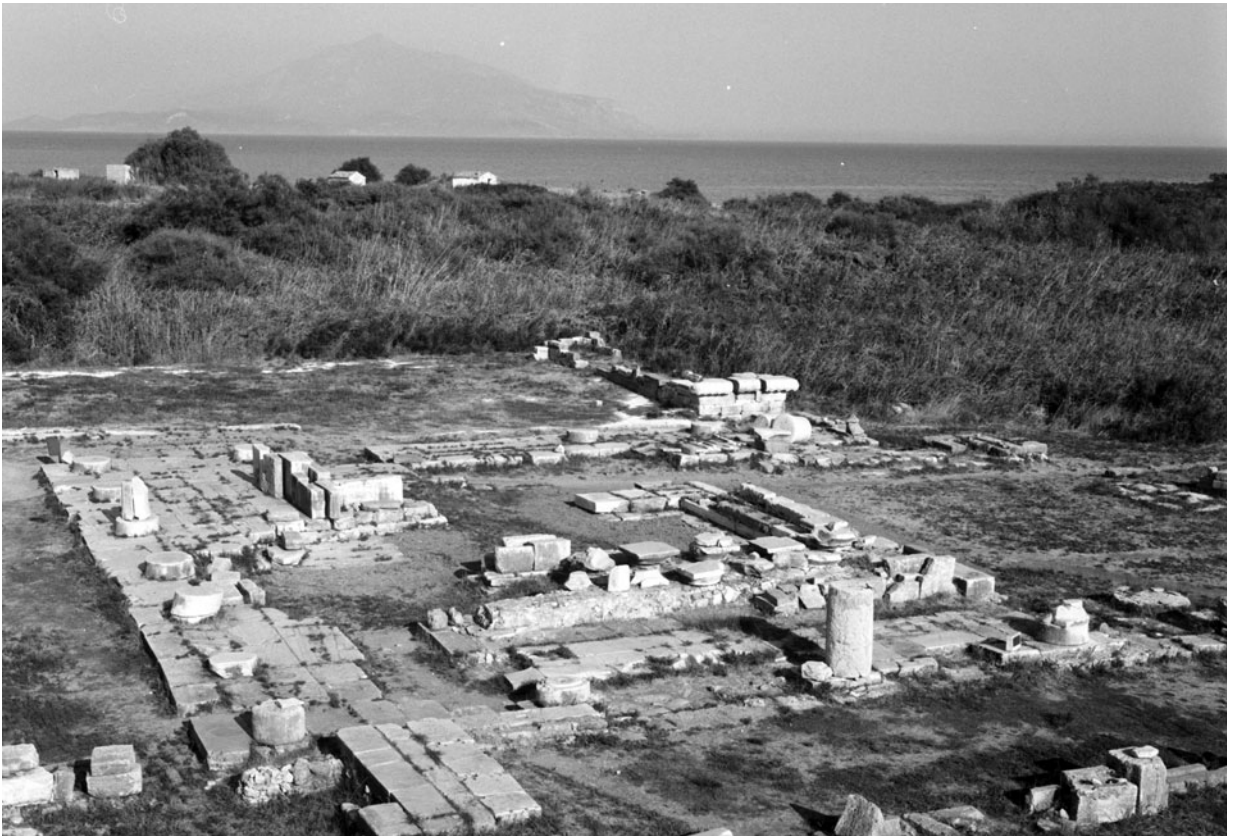


150. Kalapodi: south temple area after 2010 campaign, showing Archaic and Roman phases. © DAI (drawing: Nils Hellner).

Another site where an imperial building project has been postulated is the Roman temple at the sanctuary in **Kalapodi**, which has been the focus of renewed excavation and research work by the DAI since 2004 (**ID8989**). The site has been identified as the oracle of Apollo of Abai based, amongst others, on a statement by Pausanias (10.35.1–4); according to this, during his time the cult images of Apollo, Artemis and Leto were housed in a small temple built by Hadrian next to the ruins of the temple destroyed by the Persians.

During the 2004–2013 campaigns at Kalapodi, the remains of a small temple, already partially excavated in the late 1970s and early 1980s, were uncovered completely in the southern part of the site (**Fig. 150**). The temple, preserved only at foundation level, is a small building measuring 16.5m × 8.68m in plan, with massive foundation walls constructed from poured concrete that reach as deep as 4m into the Late Bronze Age levels. Like the Augustan temple at Actium, the Roman temple at Kalapodi rests directly on top of the eastern part of the Archaic South Temple, making selective reuse of its standing architectural remains. Excavation of the Archaic South Temple has revealed extensive evidence for destruction by fire dated to *ca.* 480 BC (**ID798**), after which the larger part of the temple area remained in ruins for centuries. Thus the decision to erect another temple in Roman times in close proximity must have been very deliberate and was perhaps intended to portray a contrasting image of imperial benevolence to the fate of the sanctuary in the time of the Persian Wars (Grigoropoulos 2015).

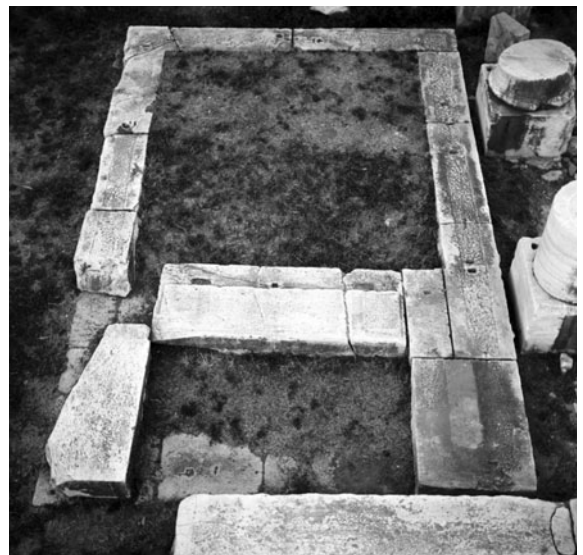
It is important to emphasize that the temples at Actium and Kalapodi, despite their carefully crafted association with pre-existing cult buildings, were new constructions, built with different methods and techniques that stood out from the inherited architectural fabric. The number of temples constructed for the first time during the Roman period to house both new and old cults was not insignificant. At the **Heraion of Samos** no less than four temples dating from Imperial times were excavated during previous



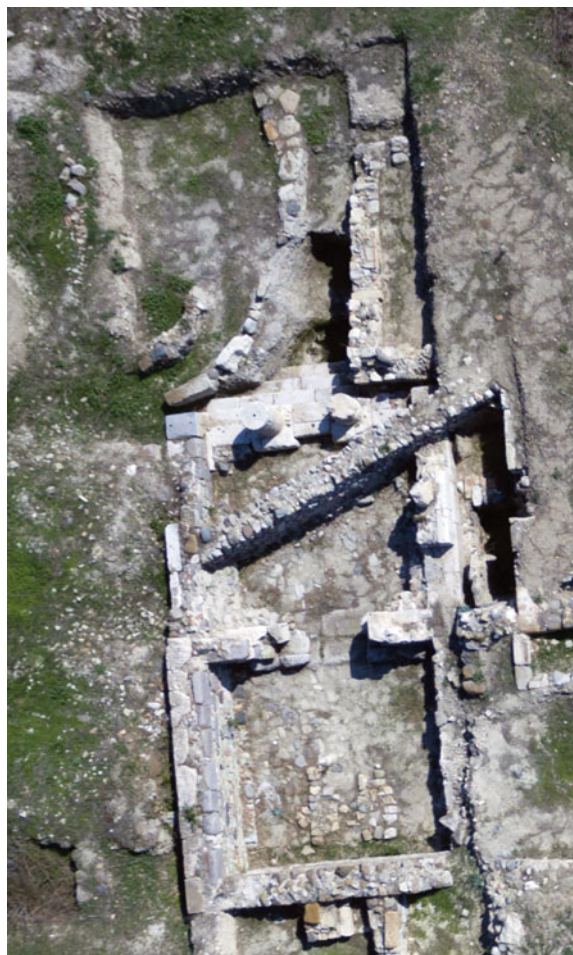
151. Samos, Heraion: the Roman 'Peripteros'. © DAI (D-DAI-ATH-ARCHIV-GA-Samos-1723-15; photo: Hermann Kienast).

work conducted by the DAI in the wider area to the east of the Archaic Great Temple of Hera and in the vicinity of the Great Altar. The architecture of two small prostyle temples, the so-called 'Prostylos I' of the late Augustan period and the 'Prostylos II' constructed later (Antonine), have formed the subject of a doctoral thesis (Schulz 2002). A second study by the same author that has appeared recently is devoted to the so-called 'Peripteros' and a smaller prostyle building (the 'Naikos'), both dated to the Augustan period (Figs 151, 152) (Schulz-Brize 2019). In another recent study, Richard Posamentir (2018), based on a detailed analysis of surviving traces of inserted gold-plated lettering on the architrave, has argued that, contrary to previous opinions, the 'Prostylos I' was dedicated to the deified Livia, the wife of Augustus. Of interest here is the thesis that the temple, despite the evidence for architectural ornaments datable to late Augustan/early Tiberian times, may in fact have been erected under Claudius, a period for which Posamentir postulates an 'Augustan revival' at the Heraion based both on epigraphic and historical grounds.

Temples were erected not only in high-profile sanctuaries or major urban centres and they did not always comprise projects commissioned by the emperor. At the sanctuary of Apollo at **Kardamaina**



152. Samos, Heraion: the Roman 'Naikos'. © DAI (D-DAI-ATH-ARCHIV-GA-Samos-1670-12; photo: Hermann Kienast).



154. Kardamaina, sanctuary of Apollo: Building Δ, view of temple façade. © National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Halasarna excavation archive (photo: Eirini Poupaki).

153. Kardamaina, sanctuary of Apollo: aerial view of Building Δ. © National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Halasarna excavation archive (photo: Eirini Miari).

(ancient Halasarna) on the island of Kos, excavations by the University of Athens since 2001 in the north-eastern part of the site have shown that Building Δ is a small distyle temple *in antis* consisting of an antechamber and a cella, raised on a podium with a flight of three steps (Figs 153, 154; ID5053, ID5055, ID6193). Pottery finds and preliminary study of the architecture suggest that the temple was constructed in the Early Roman period and saw several phases of repairs and modifications until Late Antiquity (Kokkorou-Alevra 2017; Grigoropoulos 2020). It is not known which cult(s) were housed in the temple, but a recently published statue base with a dedicatory inscription for Nero Asklepios that was built in an Early Byzantine wall close to the building may be relevant (Doulfis and Kokkorou-Alevra 2017: 132–33).

Another newly constructed temple is that dedicated to the Roman emperors in the civic centre of Elis in the western Peloponnese, a site that over the past 20 years has seen much work on its Roman phases (ID8307, ID8321, ID8324). The temple was excavated in the 1960s by the Greek Archaeological Service, but the first study of the excavated remains and building phases was published only recently (Andreou 2018). It is one of the few temples built specifically for the imperial cult that is attested archaeologically from the province of Achaëa, in contrast to the more common accommodation of emperor worship in pre-existing cult buildings dedicated to other gods or within other public spaces (Evangelidis 2008). The temple's dedication has been associated traditionally with Nero's visit and participation in the Olympic Games in AD 67, while its destruction is placed between AD 166 and 173, based on epigraphic finds and the testimony of Pausanias (6.24.10), who describes a temple with a fallen roof dedicated to the Roman emperors. Nevertheless, this destruction did not mark the end of the temple. Extensive discussion is dedicated to an important phase of renovation dating between the late third and early fourth century AD that was unknown previously (Andreou 2018: 348–51).

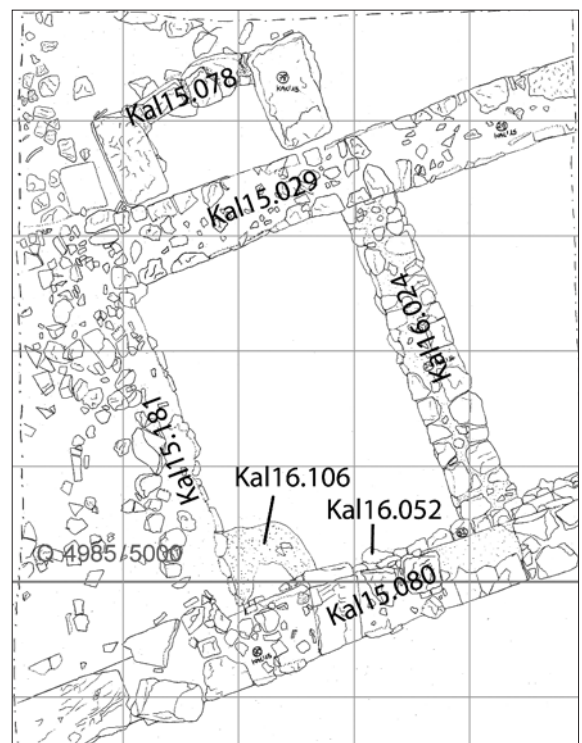
Sanctuary infrastructure

In addition to temples and cult buildings, recent work and discoveries at many sites have provided new evidence and fresh insights into various kinds of sanctuary infrastructure, i.e. buildings and features that were designed to cater for the diverse needs of the worshippers in the context of cult and life in the sanctuary. Again, a significant part of this work has been devoted to the re-examination of monuments long known or excavated long ago, such as the sanctuary of Zeus at **Olympia**. Evidence for Roman renovations and repairs was revisited as part of a new plan and 3D-recording of the South Stoa by the DAI (**ID2077**). The Leonidaion, excavated intermittently between the late 19th century and the 1950s, has also seen important work on its Roman phases in recent years. Originally built in 330 BC, the complex was used in Roman Imperial times to provide lodgings and banqueting facilities for imperial functionaries. An extensive report detailing work in the 1950s was published a few years ago (Fuchs 2013) and a major architectural restudy, complemented by limited excavation, is currently under way (Mächler 2015). Previous work has indicated major phases of renovation under Hadrian and in the early third century AD. Following the recent investigations, it has been confirmed that the building underwent reconstruction already in the Flavian period, presumably after an earthquake (Schauer *et al.* 2020). Excavations by the DAI and the EPCA of Ilia have also documented the Roman phases of other important monuments (**ID8816**), such as a large part of the gymnasium area (**ID886**, **ID5047**) and the start mechanisms of the stadium (**ID2505**).

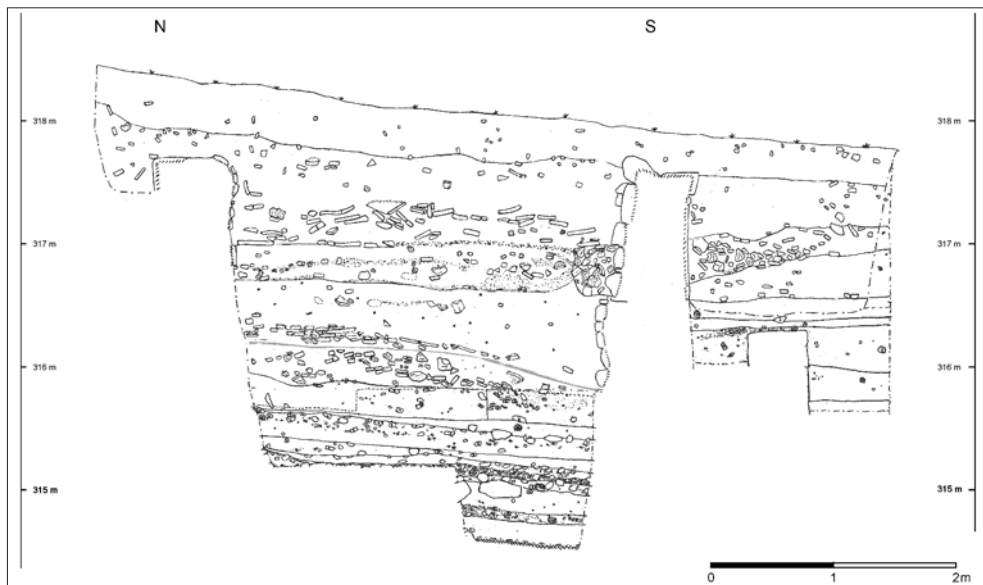
Infrastructure buildings and landscaping during Roman times have been the subject of recent work on sanctuaries in Phokis and Boeotia. At the sanctuary of Apollo at **Ptoon/Kastraki**, an architectural study of the terracing walls by the EfA has yielded an inscription dating to the Roman period, perhaps indicating a building project (**ID8620**). During 2018 and 2019, work was carried out by the EfA on the terrace of the West Portico (the so-called Portico of the Aetolians) at **Delphi**, following excavations during 2010–2013 that focused on the portico itself. Excavations and subsequent study of the finds suggest that already by the end of the Hellenistic period, or the beginning of the Imperial era when the portico presumably formed the main entrance to the sanctuary of Apollo, the eastern end of the terrace was backfilled and paved (**ID8506**). Roman interventions dated to the first century AD are reported in the western part of the terrace (**ID8599**).

At the sanctuary of **Kalapodi**, part of a large building to the northwest of the North Classical Temple was excavated using sondages between 2015 and 2017 following an extensive programme of geophysical prospection of the sanctuary area (**ID6180**). The building is constructed with an abundance of reused material and apparently included several rectangular rooms in a row, one of which had a square annex to the north (**Fig. 155**). Investigation of the deep stratigraphy on the eastern side suggests that the building had a long history of use and experienced several destructions and repairs, especially during Middle Roman times, until its abandonment in the Late Roman period (**Fig. 156**). Although further excavation is necessary to clarify its architectural plan and function, the evidence collected so far throws new light upon the later history of the sanctuary (Sporn *et al.* 2017: 211–15).

In addition to pre-existing infrastructure that was repaired, adapted or modified for further use in the course of the Imperial period, many buildings and features were constructed for the first time. Frequent amongst these new constructions are



155. Kalapodi: sector NW1, part of Roman building. © DAI.



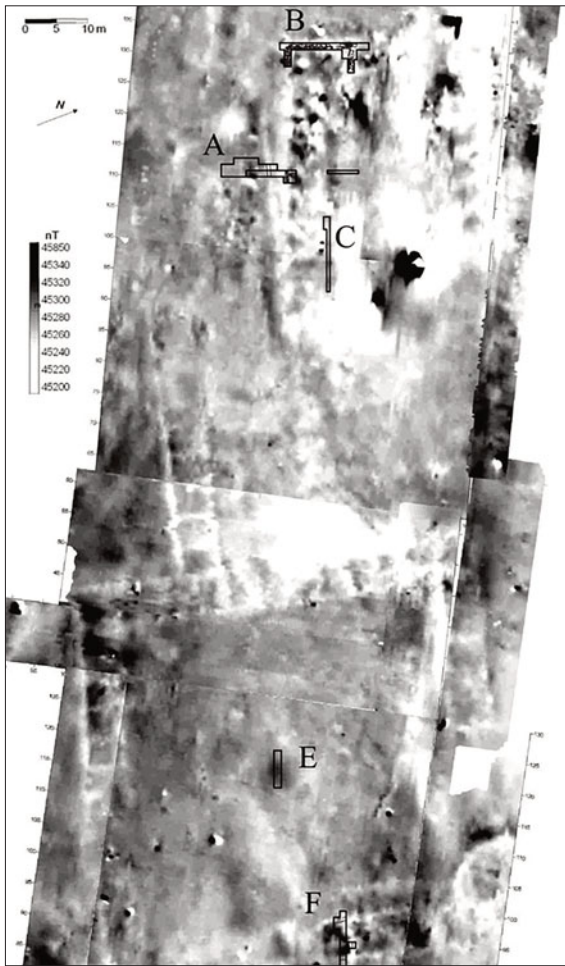
156. Kalapodi: sector NW1, stratigraphy of the east baulk. © DAI.

buildings used for congregations and mass spectacles. A prime example is the theatre in the sanctuary of Apollo Pythios at **Gortyn**, excavated by the SAIA/University of Padova between 2001 and 2013 (**ID203**, **ID780**, **ID2818**). The final publication of the excavations has now appeared (Bonetto *et al.* 2019). These have shown that the building was initially connected to the temple of Apollo and was constructed in the first half of the second century AD (see **Fig. 149**). In the Severan period, the theatre underwent a major phase of renovation, including new marble paving in the orchestra and marble decoration on the lower parts of the *cavea*, but the architectural connection to the temple ceased to exist. Nevertheless, it is postulated on historical and epigraphic grounds that until the third century AD the theatre was used not only for agonistic and ritual performances but also for meetings of the Cretan *koinon*.

At the sanctuary of Artemis Lykoatis near **Arachamitai** in Arcadia, excavations by the Finnish Institute at Athens have uncovered part of a large building complex, with almost square rooms around an open-air courtyard, that was identified during a magnetometer survey in 2008 (**Fig. 157**). Preliminary results suggest a date in the Early Roman period for its construction, although further work is necessary to clarify its function and phasing (**ID753**). Discoveries of buildings of Roman date, the function of which remains unclear, are also reported during recent work at the sanctuary of Poseidon at **Isthmia** by the ASCSA (**ID275**, **ID741**, **ID1883**), including a site identified as the gymnasium (**ID4882**), and at the sanctuary of the Egyptian gods at **Brexiza** near Marathon (**ID6491**, **ID8496**, **ID8497**).

In many Greek sanctuaries, the existence of features related to the supply, consumption and conspicuous display of water is one of the most well-attested and archaeologically visible aspects of Roman infrastructural intervention. Such features carried multiple messages and served various profane, cultic and symbolic functions, adding to the overall sensorial experience of a cult place, as, for instance, is argued for the fountains installed at the entrance to the precinct of Demeter and Kore at **Eleusis** (Rogers 2021). During Roman times, water played an important role in the cult at the sanctuary of Artemis Amarysia at **Amarynthos**, as indicated by a monumental fountain investigated during recent excavations by ESAG in front of the east portico (**ID6790**, **ID12997**, **ID12978**). The fountain was accessed via a staircase from the ground level, an indication, as suggested by the excavators, of ritual bathing (**Fig. 158**; **ID6790**). Preliminary evidence suggests that the fountain well, originally built in Hellenistic times, was remodelled in the second century AD, presumably as part of a wider programme of sanctuary reconstruction by Herodes Atticus (Reber *et al.* 2020).

Not least, baths, which served both the need for ordinary washing and as places for socializing for



157. Arachamitai, sanctuary of Artemis Lykoatis: results of magnetometer survey showing the (Early) Roman courtyard building (E). © Finnish Institute at Athens.

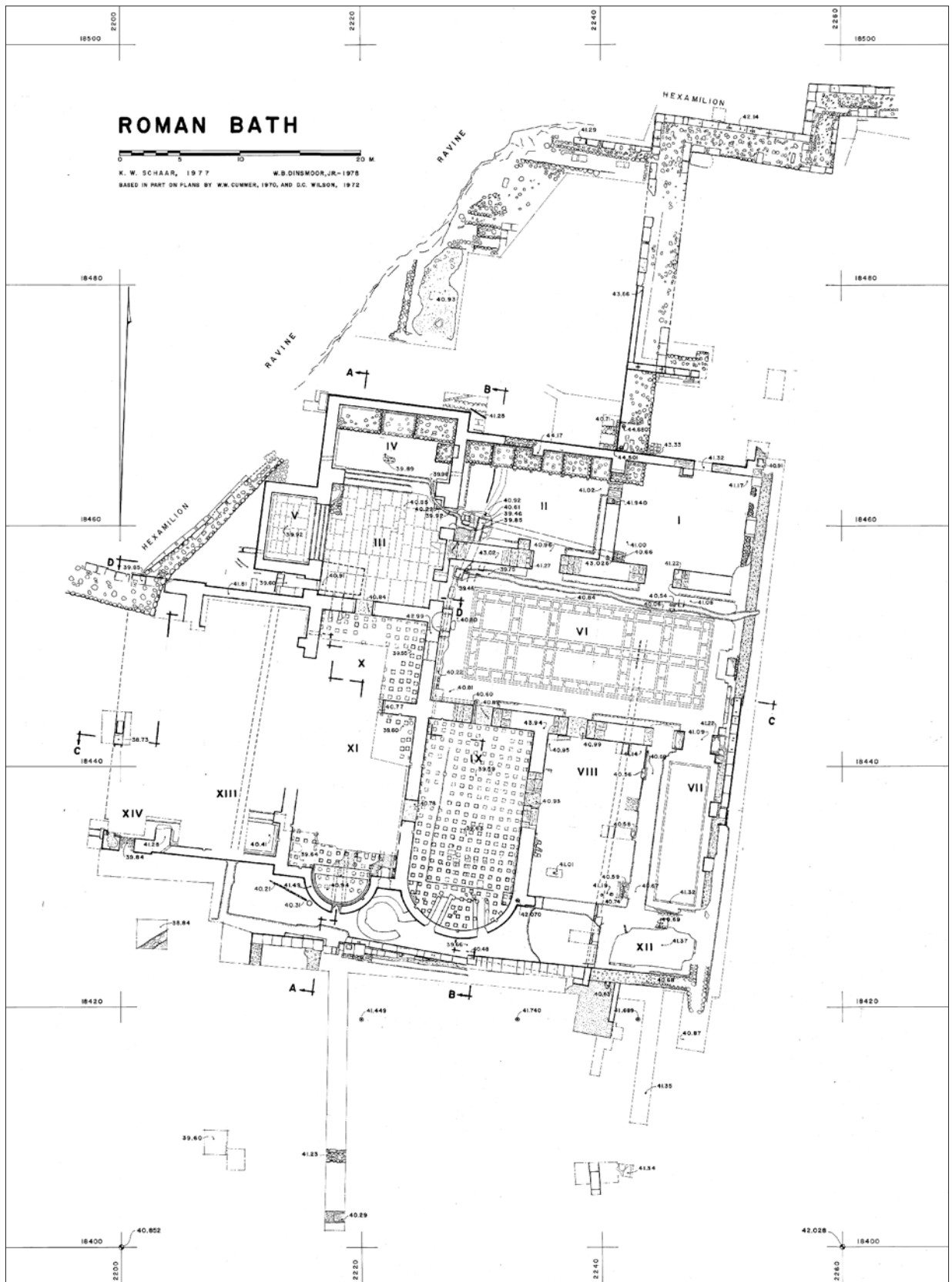


158. Amarnthos, sanctuary of Artemis Amarnthia: Roman fountain well, aerial view and photogrammetric section. Photos: T. Theurillat/ESAG.

pilgrims, visitors, temple personnel, athletes and other groups, are attested at many sanctuaries. A recent study (Yegül 2015) discusses numerous examples of such ‘sanctuary baths’, taking as a point of departure ongoing work by the ASCSA on the monumental complex known as the Roman Baths at the sanctuary of Poseidon at **Isthmia (ID275, ID741, ID1883)**. Constructed around the middle of the second century AD and occupying an area of almost 2000m², this was a lavish bathing establishment of the so-called ‘hall type’, with mosaic floors, polychrome marble revetments and stone pavements (**Fig. 159**). Recent study with a view to final publication has yielded evidence for different heating systems employed in various building phases, as well as a heated facility added to a pre-existing pool of Classical date, perhaps in the second half of the first century AD and preceding the construction of the monumental bathing complex (**ID 4882**). At **Delos**, new research on the settlement and sanctuary of Apollo during Imperial times has also concentrated on a series of baths of various sizes dating to the Middle Roman period (Bouet and Le Quéré 2016).

The diversity of cult places

Situated in monumentalized spaces or in natural locations, in urban or suburban areas as well as in the countryside, in public or in private settings, cult places during the Roman period demonstrate a wide variety of material forms and contexts of ritual practice, with elements of persistence, change and innovation. At the Kerameikos in **Athens** work by the DAI on the temenos, identified recently as the sanctuary of Artemis Soteira (Graml 2020), has shown that during the Roman Imperial period this area also housed another important cult (**ID4288, ID5116, ID6138**). Tucked between tombs and funerary



159. Isthmia: Roman baths and adjacent buildings (drawing: W.B. Dinsmoor Jr, 1978). © Michigan State University Excavations at Isthmia.

monuments, the *temenos* is an open-air courtyard of irregular plan demarcated by a wall and encompassing several features, including a niche for a cult image, a rectangular pedestal and a marble *omphalos*. During restoration work in 2012, it became evident that the *omphalos* sealed a round opening which proved to be a well lined with stone rings, the inner faces of which are inscribed with phrases identifying it as an oracle sanctuary (Stroszeck 2016). The underside of the rim of the *omphalos* carries the same type of inscription, an invocation to the oracle-bringer Paian. It appears that Apollo as a helper and healer had a central role in the sanctuary, which, in addition to being the first known oracle of ancient Athens, is also a rare example documenting the practice of hydromancy.

Numerous similar small roadside sanctuaries devoted to various cults must have existed in urban and suburban areas of many Greek cities during Roman times. At **Gortyn**, excavations by the SAIA/University of Rome ‘La Sapienza’ in the so-called Nymphaeum block (**ID2819**) have uncovered a small distyle or tetrastyle temple *in antis* probably constructed in the second half of the second century AD. The temple is located at the crossroads between two major thoroughfares to the north and west of the Praetorium block, next to the Hellenistic temple and the Roman aqueduct’s *caput aquae*. This highly symbolic location has led the excavators to argue that the temple may be the *compitum* (crossroads sanctuary) mentioned in an inscription dated to AD 169; if so, it would be a unique shrine of this type in the Greek world (Lippolis *et al.* 2012: 250–51, plan 5).

Two more recent discoveries are worth mentioning as examples of the richness and complexity of cult places in urban areas. At **Atalanti** in central Greece, a rescue excavation by the EPCA of Phthiotis and Evrytania in a small plot bordering the northeastern edge of the city’s main square, not far from the site where an opulent Early Roman *domus* came to light (**ID4624**, **ID3497**), led to the discovery of an unusual heptagonal building with a maximum outer diameter of 8.87m and walls surviving to *ca.* 1.5m in height (**Fig. 160**). The building is constructed with ashlar blocks in the lower part and poured concrete in the upper courses, and has an entrance on the west side. Pottery finds suggest that it was built at the end of the third or early fourth century AD. The interior was found covered by a 0.5m-thick layer of fine ash mixed with animal bones, charred plant remains and masses of potsherds. Near the centre, two large pits, also filled with the same material, were discovered (**Fig. 161**). Stratified evidence from these features suggests that the deposition had started already by the mid-third century AD and ended in the third quarter of the fourth century AD. It is likely that during this period the area was used for the accumulation of debris from sacrifices and ritual dining at a nearby, unknown sanctuary (Papageorgiou and Grigoropoulos forthcoming).

Another unusual cult place was discovered during a rescue excavation by the EPCA of Achaia in **Aigion** in 2001 (**ID3921**). This was a small artificial underground chamber opened in the natural bedrock, accessed via a flight of steps and furnished with a tile-paved floor, a bench and a niche with a stone base at



160. Atalanti, Agioi Theodoroi square: heptagonal building after excavation in 2015. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports: Ephorate of Antiquities of Phthiotis and Evrytania (photo: Maria Papageorgiou).



161. Atalanti, Agioi Theodoroi square: pits inside the heptagonal building, during excavation. © Ephorate of Antiquities of Phthiotis and Evrytania (photo: Maria Papageorgiou).



162. Aigion, 19 Sotiriou Lontou Street: underground chamber. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports: Ephorate of Antiquities of Achaia.



163. Vathy, Ithaca: bronze figurine from a Roman domestic shrine. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports: Ephorate of Antiquities of Kephallonia and Ithaca.

its front (Fig. 162). Based on the space's features and design, which create the impression of a cave, and the pottery, glass vessels and animal bones recovered from its fill and pointing to ritual meals, the underground chamber has been identified as a *Mithraeum* (Kollia 2003). The small size of the cult cave (4.5m × 4m × 2.6m) and its location in an area of the ancient city with no apparent relation to other public spaces has led the excavator to postulate that the sanctuary was situated in the grounds of a private residence of a local magnate and served the needs of a small community of initiates (Kollia 2010: 221). This is the first time that a cult place of Mithras has been identified by excavation in Greece and, considering previous epigraphic and archaeological evidence from other Greek sites, the discovery offers a unique insight into the material conditions and penetration of the cult in a local community.

The cult cave of Mithras at Aigion highlights the importance of private worship and cult in the domestic sphere, another area where new discoveries and important work have taken place in recent times. Domestic cult in the province of Achaia has been the subject of a doctoral dissertation (Person 2012) which analyses evidence from several sites of different rank and status, and examined continuity and change in religious practice. Finds pointing to cult practices in domestic buildings have been reported from other areas, too. At **Nikopolis**, for instance, the house of Manius Antoninus, a lavish urban residence built in the early second and renovated in the late third/early fourth century AD that has been excavated by the EPCA of Preveza (ID3164; Kyrkou 2006), included a room with a terracotta hearth, several marble sculptures and pottery; this has been interpreted either as a household shrine or as a store for family memorabilia (ID3123). Another domestic shrine is reported from a rescue excavation by the EPCA of Kephallonia and Ithaca of a building of Roman date at **Vathy** on the island of Ithaca, where a bronze figurine, perhaps depicting Asklepios (Fig. 163), was found (ID2597). Display of such images in domestic shrines was apparently not uncommon in houses of the upper classes in the cities of Roman Greece. Two studies have been devoted to the publication of relevant sculptural assemblages that were found in, or are

likely to have come from, household shrines in **Corinth** (Stirling 2008) and **Athens** (Sharpe 2014), respectively. Both assemblages comprise statues and statuettes that range in date from the first to the third/early fourth century AD, reflecting an accumulation of domestic cults over time and attesting to an eclectic mix of Greek, Italian, Egyptian and/or Oriental deities.



164. *Brexiza, Marathon, sanctuary of the Egyptian gods: aerial view.* © ASA.



165. *Brexiza, Marathon, sanctuary of the Egyptian gods: Roman lamp with images of Sarapis and Isis.* © ASA.

Perhaps the most extravagant example of domestic cult is the sanctuary of the Egyptian gods in **Brexiza**, where excavations by the ASA over the past 20 years have uncovered much of the temenos area, with the monumental propyla, and the main cult place, as well as several ancillary features and outbuildings (**Fig. 164**; **ID1752**, **ID5381**, **ID6491**, **ID8496**, **ID8497**). Situated on an artificial island within the estate of Herodes Atticus in Marathon, the sanctuary is remarkable not only for its size, layout and sheer monumentality, but also for the fact that it was a private cult centre established to advertise the family history, personal piety and status of its owner. As Maria Papaioannou (2018: 345) has argued, the sanctuary had two functions, both closely related to worship in the private sphere: firstly, as a cult place devoted to the memory of Herodes' deceased daughter Athenais and, secondly, as the monumental entrance for important private guests of the magnate arriving at the estate from the harbour. After crossing a bridge over the canal and washing at the baths, guests could proceed to the sanctuary to partake in the Egyptian mysteries, before entering the inner areas of the estate. Nocturnal rites played a part, as suggested by a deposit of some 70 lamps found *in situ* in one of the buildings (**Fig. 165**; **ID1752**; Fotiadi 2011). It is interesting that much evidence furnished by the recent excavations concerns the third and fourth centuries AD, especially in the area of Building B (**ID8496**, **ID8497**), and future study will show whether cult activity persisted until then.

Away from cities and villas, sanctuaries in extra-urban locations have also seen important work on their Roman phases. A publication has been devoted to the sanctuary of Artemis Tauropolos in **Loutsa**, the site of the Attic deme of Halai Araphenidai, based on the examination of material from the excavations conducted by the ASA in the 1950s (Kalogeropoulos 2013). Despite the problematic excavation records, the importance of this study lies in the level of detail and attention accorded to the evidence for the Roman period, mostly pottery and small finds, which, albeit limited, is reflective of cult activity at least into the Augustan period, with further material extending to the later fourth or early fifth century AD.

Restudy of archival records and finds has been at the focus of recent work by the EfA at the shrine of the **Valley of the Muses** in Boeotia, where excavations in the 19th century brought to light a series of statue bases with epigrams dating to the Augustan period. This work has led to a re-examination of the archaeology of the sanctuary, including a programme of surface cleaning and architectural study of the terrace and the remains of the altar (**ID8501**, **ID8613**). A new study and reconstruction of the monument dedicated to the Muses and its Augustan phase has appeared (Biard *et al.* 2017) and further investigations in the altar area are currently under way.

In contrast to such monumentalized sanctuaries, smaller shrines in rural areas with evidence for cult activity in the Roman period pose problems of identification, especially for regional surveys. Surface material collected during surveys, especially ceramics, which frequently form the main basis for site classification, is inherently problematic, as pottery of the Roman period rarely comprises shapes reflective of cultic or votive activities (Hayes 2000). Other finds, such as terracottas, may provide more clues, as for instance at a site investigated during a rescue excavation by the EPCA of Eastern Attica near **Glyka Nera** in the Mesogeia area and identified as a shrine dedicated to Aphrodite (**ID2257**). Future publication and comparative study of relevant ceramic and small finds assemblages from excavated rural shrines holds much potential with regards to this issue.

Late Antiquity: endings and beginnings

The end of pagan cults and the transformation of sanctuaries in Late Antiquity are further subjects that have attracted much scholarly attention in recent years. For mainland Greece and the islands, several syntheses (Gutsfeld and Lehmann 2008; Saradi and Eliopoulos 2011) and regional studies (Sanders 2005; Deligiannakis 2011; Sweetman 2015; Sweetman *et al.* 2018) have appeared, emphasizing the persistence of paganism and the variety of responses to the expansion of Christianity.

Archaeological evidence for the tenacity of pagan practices takes many forms and comes from various settings. Several previously unknown architectural repairs to the Parthenon on the Acropolis of **Athens** have been the subject of a doctoral dissertation by Eleni Lambrinou (2015), who attributes them to the later part of the third century AD or the first decades of the fourth. At **Messene**, the sanctuary of Isis appears to have undergone a major refurbishment dated to the fourth and fifth centuries AD that involved the addition of a large building with stone benches and cisterns, the function of which has been associated with initiation rites (**Fig. 166**; **ID6527**, **ID6528**). At **Kardamaina**, a square *bothros* in front of Building Γ, containing sacrificial debris (**ID10156**), was probably one of the latest foci of pagan cult in the sanctuary of Apollo (**Fig. 167**; Kokkorou-Alevra and Deligiannakis 2004).

Damage to temples or cult statues provides further, indirect, evidence for the level of vitality of paganism. The most dramatic example comes from the Sebasteion in **Eretria**, where the cult images were intentionally destroyed (**ID11465**; Schmid 2001). At **Messene** excavation of a Π-shaped reservoir belonging to the sanctuary of Isis to the south of the theatre yielded a cache of sculpture fragments belonging to a seated statue of Isis nursing Horus (**Fig. 168**) that were dumped there at the end of the fourth century AD, presumably by Christians (**ID8791**, **ID886**).

These last examples are noteworthy not least because temple desecration is poorly attested archaeologically in Greece and elsewhere in the Empire and because recent research has suggested that such phenomena were much less widespread than previously thought (Sweetman 2010; 2015). It is of course important to remember that not all destructions of temples known from this period can be attributed to Christian fanaticism. Natural catastrophes and the growing lack of investment by civic and imperial authorities could have precipitated their decay.

At **Gortyn**, the temple of Apollo Pythios together with the small theatre probably suffered extensive damage during the earthquake of AD 365, as suggested by recent work carried out by the SAIA/University of Padova (Bonetto *et al.* 2020: 462). Damage attributed to the earthquake that hit Kos in AD 469 is also reported at several pagan cult buildings of the sanctuary of Apollo in **Kardamaina**, though by that time these were probably already defunct or in a state of disrepair (**ID10156**). Still, some sanctuaries continued to be foci of activity, even after the end of temples and the official ban on blood sacrifices. Recent research has emphasized that stadia and theatres in **Olympia**, **Nemea**, **Isthmia** and **Delphi** were maintained in



166. Messene: view of sanctuary of Isis looking towards theatre, during excavation. © ASA.



167. Kardamaina, sanctuary of Apollo: late bothros pit and other features in front of the eastern façade of Building Γ. © National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Halasarna excavation archive (photo: Georgia Kokkorou-Alevra).



168. Messene: marble statue of Isis nursing Horus. © ASA.

functional condition until well into the first half of the fifth century AD, suggesting that some pagan traditions, such as games and mass spectacles, carried on with the toleration and/or support of the imperial and local authorities for decades after the official ban of temples (Gutsfeld and Lehmann 2008; 2013). Beyond high-profile sanctuaries, lingering pagan practice is difficult to identify but could be indicated by the persistence or revival of cult caves in some regions, especially in Attica (Saradi and Eliopoulos 2011: 287–88). Something similar is suggested by the display of pagan imagery in domestic contexts, such as a relief of Palmyrene gods found in Building Z, a luxurious Late Roman urban residence, underneath the New Acropolis Museum in **Athens (ID1705; Saraga 2018)**.

Even if pagan traditions persisted until late, archaeological evidence suggests that the spatial and material transformations of sanctuaries accelerated from the fifth century AD onwards, signalling a profound change in their organization and use. Churches and other buildings for Christian cult only rarely took over pagan temples (Sweetman 2010; 2015; Sweetman *et al.* 2018), and one aspect of the transition to Christianity that has emerged through recent work is the profanization of sanctuary spaces and their use for domestic, agricultural and industrial activities.



169. Amyklai, sanctuary of Apollo: plan view of the South Building. © ASA.

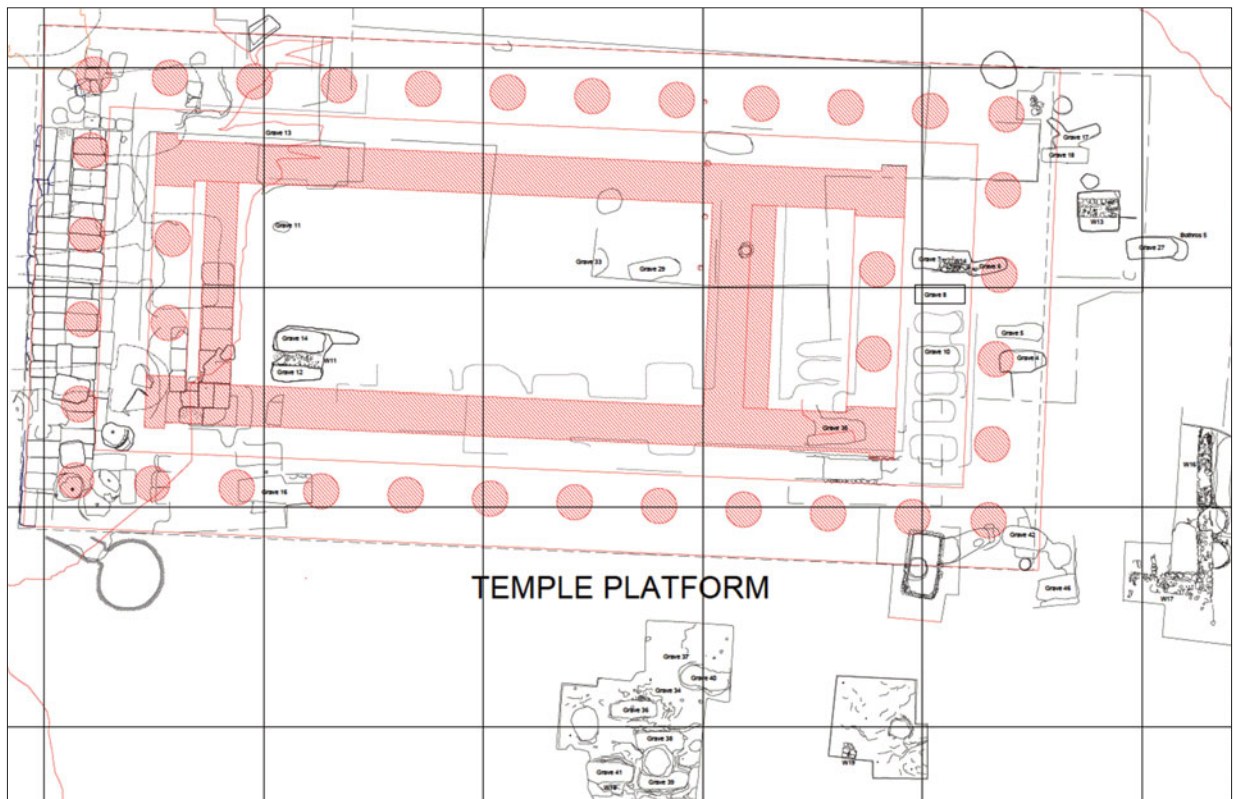
At the sanctuary of Apollo at **Amyklai**, excavations by the ASA in the South Building, which in earlier times was part of the sanctuary's infrastructure, have documented extensive Late Roman industrial activity (**Fig. 169; ID6895**). At the sanctuary of Zeus at **Dodona**, rooms to the south of the so-called Priest's House have furnished evidence for Late Roman domestic use, which, according to the excavator, came to an end due to an earthquake in AD 522/528 (**ID3170**). Expansion of settlement is well-attested at **Nemea**, where several houses, cemeteries and evidence for agricultural exploitation have been the focus of recent work (**ID1880, ID4881; Miller 2015**), and especially at **Kardamaina**, where excavations

over the years have mapped the expansive settlement encroachment of sanctuary space from the fifth to about the mid-seventh century AD (**ID12958, ID12903, ID6612, ID6193, ID5055, ID4217, ID3061, ID2686**). The establishment of a small settlement during Late Antiquity has also been documented during excavations by the EPCA of the Cyclades at the sanctuary on the islet of **Despotiko (ID655)**.

Defunct cult buildings became the target of spoliation or they were left to decay and were taken over by cemeteries, as shown by excavations by the EPCA of Boeotia/ASCSA at the sanctuary of Apollo Ismenios in **Thebes (Fig. 170; ID4215, ID5059)**. This kind of activity marks, in a sense, the 'second life' of pagan sites (Gutsfeld and Lehmann 2013). How this pagan legacy and its material remains were perceived by the communities that used them is largely elusive.

Conclusion

Archaeological research on Greek sanctuaries over the past 20 years has yielded an impressive amount of new information concerning their character and evolution from the time of the Roman conquest to Late Antiquity. Despite different frameworks, fieldwork methodologies and research agendas, some common trends may be identified. First, 'late' phases are now treated as part of the entire site sequence and with the same level of detail, not least in cases where the evidence is less monumental or 'canonical'. Not only high-profile individual monuments in sanctuaries of supra-regional significance but also humbler remains in regional cult centres and smaller shrines in a variety of contexts have been the focus of fieldwork and study. Textual evidence is still considered important but there is a clear shift towards extracting meaning from evidence of all kinds. Small finds and pottery, together with archaeobotanical and archaeozoological data, now form equally significant areas of study and publication, as do more traditional types of material, such as inscriptions, sculpture and architecture.



170. Thebes, sanctuary of Apollo Ismenios: temple area with Late Roman graves and other features (plan by D.R. Scahill). © Ismenion Hill Synergasia Project.

This integrated approach to the study of the past is an important step towards an enhanced understanding of cult, sanctuary life and the chronology of Roman activity at each site, which in most cases are still poorly known. In addition to the results of recent and ongoing fieldwork, much of the work surveyed above is the result of re-examination of material excavated long ago. Despite problems related to data quality, such re-studies have the potential not only to contribute new evidence but also to test long-standing theories and, in some cases, to correct inherited misconceptions. Overall, such work is paving the way for far more interesting and complex long-term histories of Greek sanctuaries than previously envisaged.

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