

Agia Paraskevi of Arachamitai

Report on the 2015 Season

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Between 2010 and 2014 we excavated parts of a Hellenistic courtyard building, which belonged to the sanctuary of Artemis Lykoatis mentioned by Pausanias (8.36.7). It had at least two building phases, the first one dating to ca. 300 BC and the second to the second century BC. It was destroyed during the last decades BC and soon afterwards replaced by another much larger late courtyard building that was located further to the east. Between the early and later courtyard building we detected in 2014 remains of a monumental altar or temple (FIG 1). In 2015 we began a new five-year programme, the main aim of which is to find out more about the centre of cult.

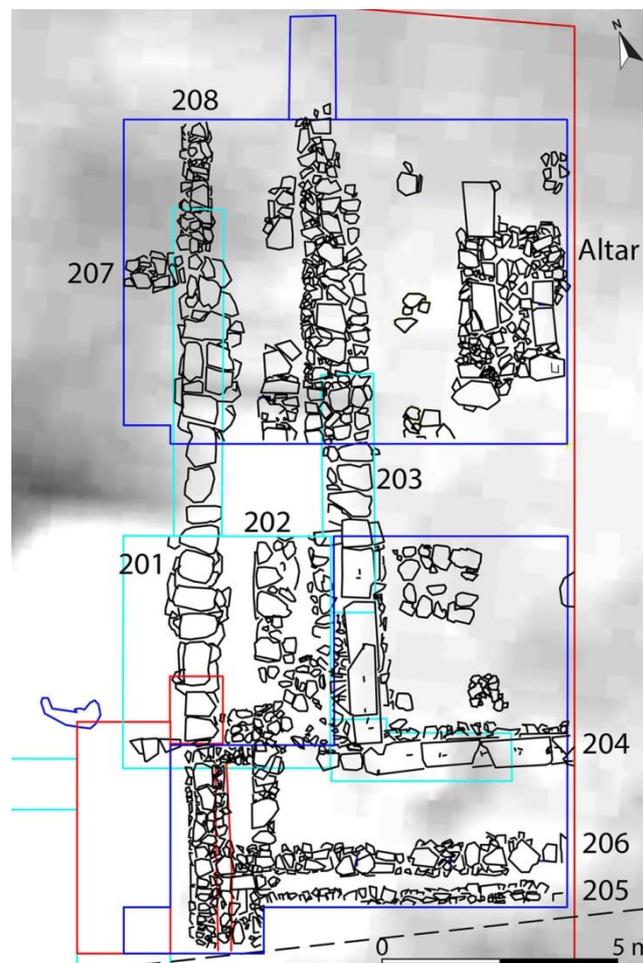


Fig. 1. Plan of the temple and altar area, situation at the end of the 2015 season.

We now have a much better picture of the diachronic development of cult at what is the very centre of the sanctuary. Cult activity began with an ash altar with a thickness of ca. 30-50 cm, consisting of charcoal, ash, very black soil, burnt bone fragments and a large amount of early pottery and votive offerings. The finds from the ash altar date between the late seventh and the fifth centuries BC, although a series of C-14 samples indicates that it stretches back at least to the eighth century BC. A special feature of the early cult are the small juglets, oinochoai or aryballoi that were dedicated upside down, i.e., with the mouth downwards, several of which are completely preserved. Such juglets were above all found in the ash altar itself, but some of them also in its closest neighbourhood.

The ash altar went out of use at some stage when a building was constructed, to which the foundations of wall 202, 203, 204, and possibly also of 206 belong. The rubble stone filling between wall 204 and 206 also are part of the foundation of this building, which may have been a temple. Among the few remaining parts of its upper structure can be mentioned a badly rolled Doric capital dating to the Classical period and a complete archaizing Corinthian antefix painted in red, black and white and dating to the fifth century BC. The complete antefix was found squeezed into the stone rubble on the south side of wall 204, which indicates that it probably was placed there as a foundation offer in connection with the construction of the building, which thus probably should be dated to the second half of the fifth century BC.

This possible temple was thoroughly destroyed during the fourth century BC. The white well-worked limestone blocks placed on top of the foundations of wall 203 and 204 may originally have belonged to the early temple, but are not any more in their original place. They have been re-used for a new building which was covered by a Laconian roof, the southern part of which is preserved. It can be dated to the Hellenistic period and includes similar tile stamps as used in the roof of the early courtyard building. The layer below the collapsed roof, partly consisting of the floor level, partly of finds on top of the floor, also dates to the Hellenistic period, e.g. including three coins dating to the third century BC. Five small square stone constructions aligned along the east and north side of wall 203 and 204 seem to belong to this same building phase, perhaps being the bases of wooden columns. The function of the Hellenistic building remains unclear, but it probably was connected to the early courtyard building.

The last phase of cult activity is represented by a rectangular stone structure, the foundation of which measures ca. 3x2 m. Two 65 cm high well-cut orthostate blocks of white limestone give a rough idea of the original height of the structure. Around it, especially on its

southern and southwestern side a black soil layer mixed with charcoal, burnt bones and large amounts of fragments of Roman lamps was found, the most recent lamp being manufactured by Phosphoros and dating to between ca. 150 and 225 after Christ (FIG 2). These finds indicate that we are dealing with a small stone altar that was in use during the early Roman period. The altar was probably built shortly after the destruction of the early courtyard building. In combination with the construction of the Roman altar, the spot where it was erected must have been cleaned from earlier debris, including the remains of the collapsed Hellenistic roof.



Fig. 2. Lamp manufactured by Phosphoros, ca. 150-225 after Christ

Apart from excavating the cult centre we also opened some trenches connected to the Hellenistic courtyard building. One of our trenches uncovered part of an oblong room of the south wing that originally opened towards the courtyard through a row of square pilasters, of which we so far have found three bases. This room was during a later building phase divided into two parts, Room 11 and Room 12, probably in connection with the construction of the large channel that leads water from the courtyard below the south wing (west part of Room 11). It is possible that Room 11 at this late Hellenistic stage had no roof, but rather was part of the open court: at least no clear collapsed roof could be found in Room 11, something which differs completely from the adjacent Room 12.

A small trench in the central courtyard revealed remains of the northernmost part of the same later wall which divides Room 11 from Room 12 and which continues into the courtyard. As the outermost foundation of the L-shaped end of the wall, roughly in the

middle of the courtyard, we found in re-used position a Classical stele of white limestone. Before being re-used as a foundation block the stele had been in fire, which destroyed its frontal surface where one would have expected an inscription.

The beginning of cult can on the basis of our work in 2015 be pushed back at least to the eight century BC and we are able to follow it without interruption until the turn from the second to third century after Christ. Cult began at an ash altar which towards the end of the fifth century was followed by what probably was a temple. After the destruction of this early building at some stage in the fourth century, cult continued at a building which was connected to the early courtyard building that was destroyed during the last decades BC. Shortly after a new large courtyard building was built further towards the east. However, cult still continued close to the spot of the ash altar, now at a small stone altar.