

Agia Paraskevi of Arachamitai

Report on the 2017 Season

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During the first five-year excavation programme 2010-2014 we concentrated upon a Hellenistic building with central courtyard (ca. 45x30 m). Roof tile stamps prove that it belonged to the sanctuary of Artemis Lykoatis mentioned by Pausanias (8.36.7). It was destroyed during the last decades BC and replaced by a larger Roman courtyard building (ca. 65x65 m) further to the east. In 2015 we began a new five-year excavation programme focusing on the centre of cult that was located between the Hellenistic and Roman courtyard buildings.

Our work in 2017 helped us to form a more detailed picture of the development of cult (Fig. 2). We have new evidence for the beginning of cult activity, consisting of a Geometric 1 pin (ninth to eighth century BC) and a Late Geometric stamp pendant with pyramidal body (Fig. 1). The early pottery is very badly preserved, but includes Late Geometric and Early Protocorinthian sherds, probably also some Middle Geometric, and one Proto-Geometric sherd. The early finds are concentrated around a small stone construction (1.4x1 m) totally embedded in dark soil mixed with ash, charcoal, burnt bone fragments, macrofossiles and early pottery and votive offerings. This construction, which probably is the oldest altar, was constructed on the bottom of a shallow pit cut into the sterile soil.

A couple of meters further to the west we uncovered in 2015 another stone construction (1.8x1.6 m). Concentrated around it was a thick layer of dark soil, mixed with ash, charcoal, burnt bone fragments, macrofossiles and early pottery and votive offerings, mostly dating to the sixth and fifth centuries BC, although partly stretching into the fourth century BC. At some stage during the sixth and fifth century BC several south-north directed (201, 202 and possibly also the foundations of 203), and east-west directed walls (206 and the foundations of 204) were constructed. We now interpret them (as well as the stone filling between walls 204 and 206) as part of terracing, the purpose of which was to create a stable platform for cult activity (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1. Geometric 1 pin (ninth to eight century BC) and Geometric stamp pendant with pyramidal body.

The next stage of development included a third stone altar raising above ground (2x3.2 m), of which the foundation and the orthostate blocks remains (a *terminus post quem* is offered by two late fourth century BC coins found between the stones of the altar). Roughly concurrently with this new altar what looks like a peristyle was constructed around the altar area, thus creating a second inner courtyard measuring ca. 16x10 m. The upper structure of the porch remains unclear, although its collapsed roof was found along the south, east and north sides of the courtyard.

The peristyle was destroyed together with the Hellenistic courtyard building ca. 30 BC. However, cult activity continued until the early third century AD. Roman finds, including pottery, lamps, coins, figurines and other votive offerings were found mixed with dark soil, ash, burnt bone fragments and macrofossiles in two spots; around the Hellenistic altar and around a heap of stones (including reused architectural blocks) ca. 3 m to the southeast of the

Hellenistic altar. This second spot, which was especially rich in finds, was partly excavated in 2016 and partly this year when we found e.g. a bronze lamp, fragments of a life-size terracotta statue and several bronze and terracotta figurines.

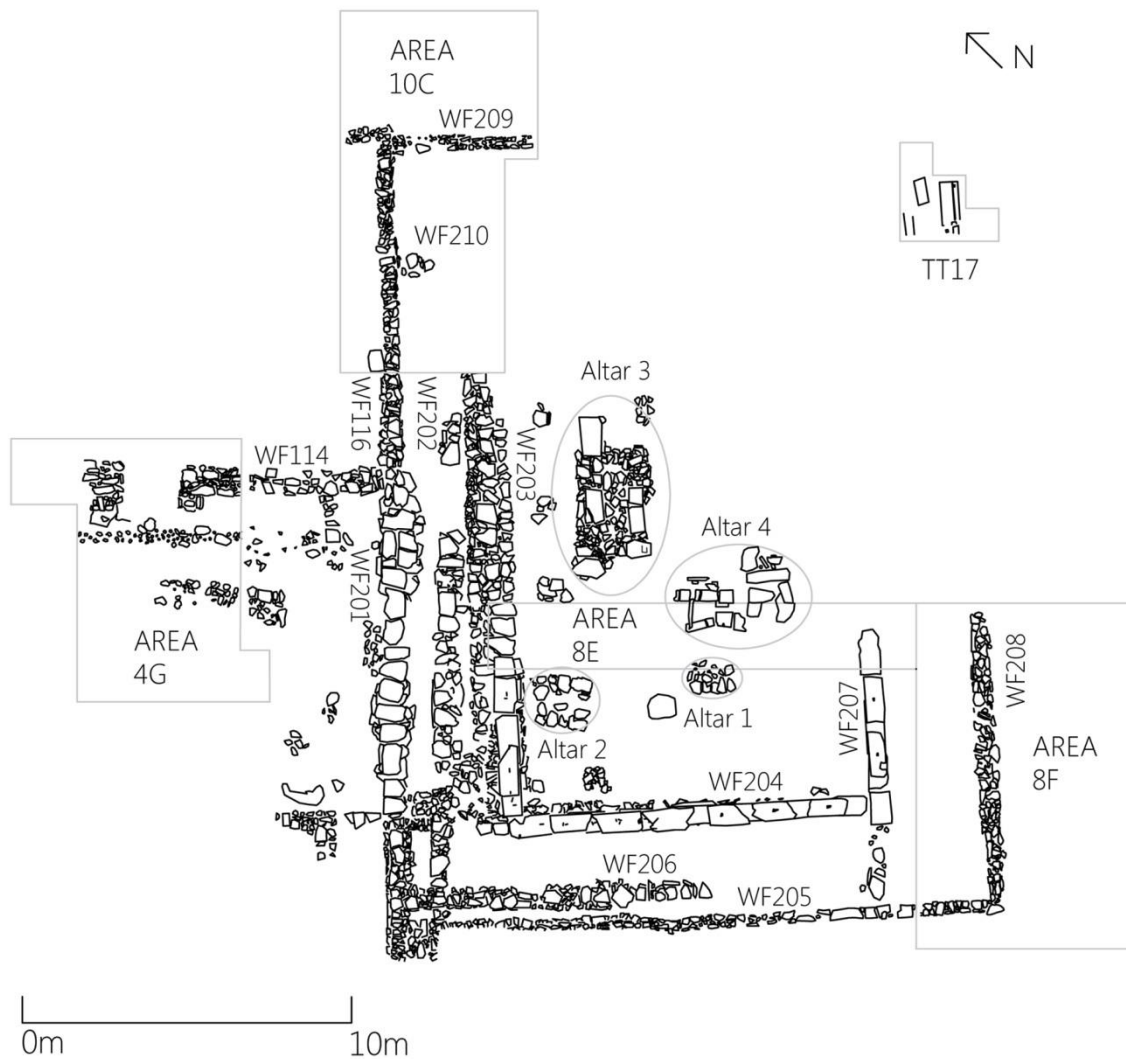


Fig. 2. Agia Paraskevi of Arachamitai. Marked are the areas that were excavated in 2017.

Outside and to the southeast of the peristyle we found a dump mainly containing finds from the fourth until the mid-second century BC. This material most likely originates from the courtyard around the altars, where very little Hellenistic finds were recorded, probably because it had been dumped here in what originally may have been a ditch. The finds include large amounts of pottery, fragmentary terracotta figurines and other votive offerings, including several bronze figurines and small bronze reliefs (among which two depicting Pan and one depicting a seated female, possibly Demeter). A handful of objects from the centre of

cult were finally found in secondary context. The most spectacular of these is a badly corroded Late Archaic bronze statuette, of the in Arcadia commonly appearing male shepherd clothed in short chiton and conical hat.

We also continued investigating the courtyard of the Hellenistic building to the west of the cult centre. The stratigraphy reminds of the one documented already in 2016. Lowermost there was a thick dark layer mainly containing pottery of the Archaic, but also to some degree of the Classical period. Drinking cups and small jugs are the most common shapes, but there are also some small oil bottles as well as fragments of a pyxis and a thymiaterion. Joining sherds do occur and sometimes complete profiles of the drinking cups could even be reconstructed. We are here dealing with a dump connected to communal eating/drinking. There are, except for three fragments of terracotta figurines, no objects clearly connected to cult activity.

Directly above the early dump followed a layer consisting of coarse gravel and small stones. This same layer was in 2016 interpreted as the surface of the open courtyard of the Hellenistic building. This year the gravel layer was found covered by a collapsed roof tile layer, both of which terminating in the north at the faint remains of an east to west running wall. The roof tile layer included three Hellenistic tile stamps of the same type as found during previous years in the Hellenistic courtyard building. However, if it is connected to the faint remains of the east to west running wall, then it must, on stratigraphic grounds be older than the last phase of the Hellenistic courtyard building.

Part of the collapsed roof tile layer was covered by a thin clayey soil layer dating from the late third to the second century BC. This layer gives a *terminus ante quem* for the roof tile layer and may itself be connected to a later building phase when there existed an open courtyard. After the destruction of the Hellenistic building the courtyard was covered by a ca. 15-20 cm thick layer. It is homogeneously Roman in date, filled with red-slipped table ware (drinking cups, jugs, plates), cooking ware as well as fragments of glass vessels and several coins. The composition of the pottery indicates preparation of food and communal eating/drinking. However, all the sherds are badly worn and seldom join.

Finally, we excavated part of the southwesternmost room of the Roman courtyard building, ca. 40 m to the southeast of the centre of cult. We had earlier reconstructed this building as consisting of square rooms surrounding a square courtyard that could be reached only through monumental propyla from the west and east. However, the room excavated in 2017 could only be reached from outside, through a door opening in the western wall. There

was no access from the room to the courtyard or to the neighbouring rooms, which indeed is strange.

Certain features of the walls built of local limestones without any mortar point towards a Roman date. The walls were constructed by stones, interspaced at certain distances by layers of bricks. The sides of the door are also lined with several layers of bricks. No finds were made in the room, nor were there any remains of a roof. Either the roof tiles were meticulously collected and reused somewhere else when the building went out of use, or then the room had a roof made of some non-preservable organic material, or alternatively the construction of the large courtyard building was never finished.