

Jürgen Weidner

Mount Olympus

Ancient Sites

Museums

Monasteries and Churches



For
the most beloved women in my life

Hermine

and

Ursula

Jürgen Weidner

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Museums

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Imprint

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Cover: Statue of Alexander the Great, Alexandrion, Litochoro (Photo: Jürgen Weidner)

Whence each of the gods came into being,
or whether they always existed, and what their functions were,
the Greek did not know until recently — yesterday, so to speak.

Hesiod and Homer...were the ones who made a theogony for the Greeks
and gave the gods their names and distinguished their honors and skills
and indicated their forms.

Herodotus 2.53.12

Olympus

Significant. Massive. Formative. Proud!

Seat of the gods. Homer found them here, Hesiod described them to us.

History. Phoenicians, Mycenaeans, Greeks, Thracians, Macedonians, Romans, Byzantines,
Franks, Venetians and Ottomans. They all left their mark on us and shaped the country.

Mountains. The highest peaks of Greece. Steep. Lonely. Quiet.

Sea. Nowhere is Poseidon closer to Zeus.

People. They were, they are, and they will be; so the Muses sang to Zeus. And... we are.

Truly, he is beautiful!

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Prologue

The Olympus and his surroundings are fascinating. Off the main touristic tracks, one will find silence and solitude. The mountains offer more than just nature. In Greek mythology, he was the seat of the gods, some people still believe in them today. Since the Olympus region can give culturally interested people more than mountains and beaches, I have decided to publish a book about the known, the lesser known and the hidden sights. Although it is a non-fiction book, it can also serve as a detailed travel guide.

The focus is on the topic of archaeology. But since I am neither a historian nor an archaeologist, I have asked competent professionals for help. At this point, I would like to highlight the commitment of the archaeologists of the Ephorate Archaeotiton Pierias, Katerini (former 27th Ephorate for Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities). They showed my wife and me details of the archaeological sites, provided us with information and sources, partially checked our texts and, if necessary, supplemented and corrected them. This book describes the most important, but not all, ancient and Byzantine antiquities of the region. I have published a large part of my texts on Wikipedia.

The “Olympic” archaeology has made great strides in recent decades. The excavations in Dion were continuously driven forward. In the rest of Pieria, archaeologists have dealt with historically important sites such as Methone or Leivithra. During the construction work on the tracks of the highway and the railway line Athens — Thessaloniki, several antique settlements were discovered. The oldest among them were already founded in the Neolithic. In Methone, Pydna, Dion, Leivithra and the castle of Platamonas things remain exciting. The archaeological excavations are currently only resting on these places.

This book is free. I do not get any income from it. If you liked it, please consider donating to the organization “Το χαμόγελο του παιδιού”, (to chamogelo tou pediou, the smile of children) in Greece. Your donation benefits needy children. More information can be found here:

<https://www.hamogelo.gr/gr/en/home/>

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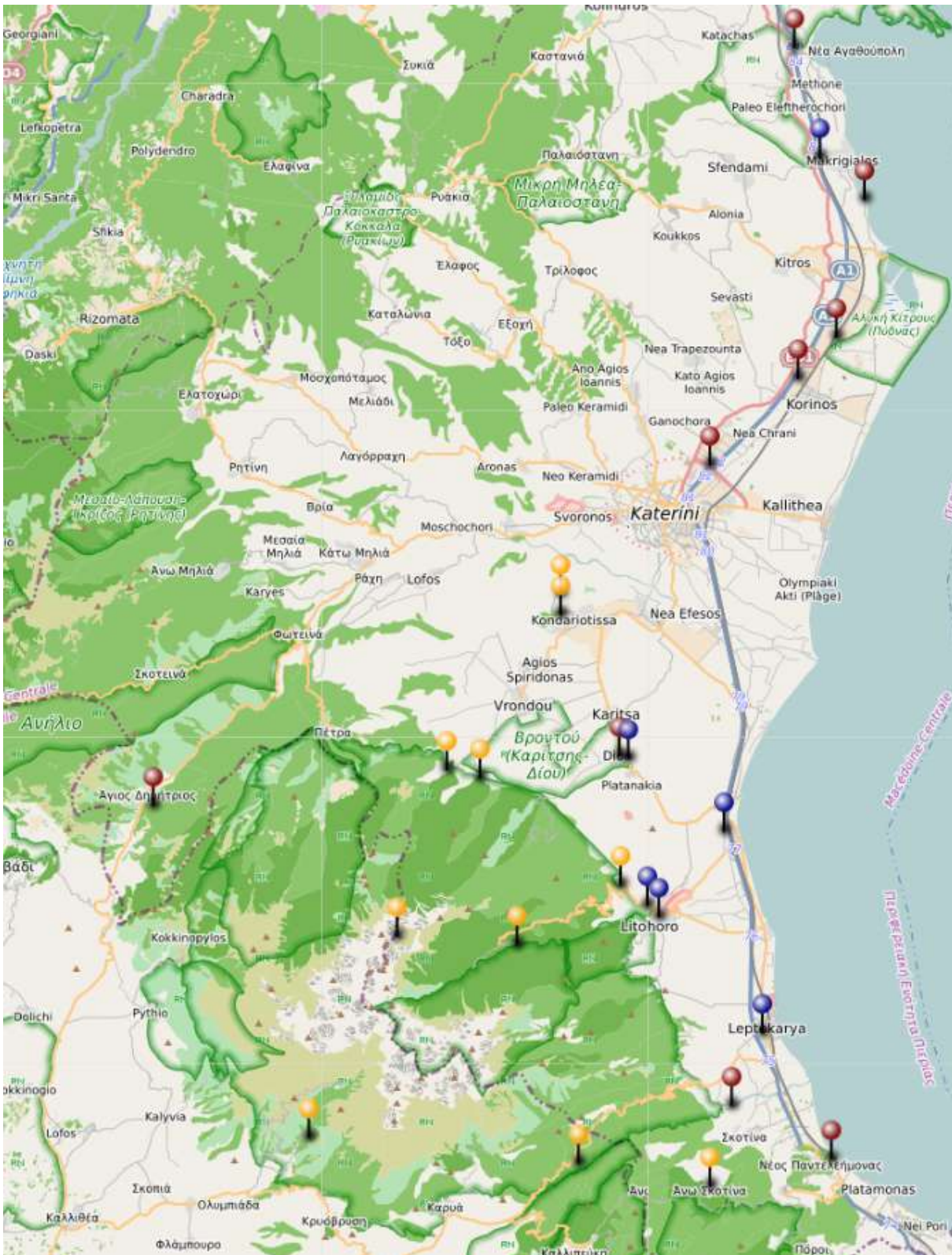
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Map



This map was created with data from the Open Street Map Foundation.

Ancient sites

Museums

Monasteries and Churches

History and Archaeology — an overview

During the last decades, numerous ancient sites have been excavated in the surroundings of Mount Olympus. The oldest are from the Neolithic, the most recent from the Byzantine period.¹

Historically and archaeologically significant epochs

Neolithic, circa 6500 to 3000 BC

The area around the Olympus and the Pieria Mountains was populated in the 7th millennium BC, possibly from the east.² The surrounding area offered the settlers good living conditions, such as a mild climate, water, fertile farmland, and hunting grounds. Finds from this period come among others from Korinos, Ritini, Pigi Athinas, and Makrygialos. Remnants of settlements have barely been excavated, but graves with various burial objects were found: stone and earthen figures, pottery, bone and stone tools, flint arrowheads, and jewelry made of bone or clay.³

Bronze Age, circa 3000 to 1000 BC

The settlement shifted in the Bronze Age from the mountains towards the sea. Metalworking, shipping and, related trade brought some prosperity to the region. The archaeological finds from this period come, among others, from the regions around Platamonas (ancient Heraklion), Aiginio, Methone, Pydna, Pigi Artemidos, Trimbina, Kitros (Louloudies) and Korinos.⁴

In addition to individual tombs necropolis and settlements were discovered. The findings from this period include clay pots and larger storage vessels, metal tools, and weapons, as well as jewelry made of gold, silver, bronze and glass.

Mycenaean period, circa 1650 to 1050 BC

The late Bronze Age is referred to as the Mycenaean period in southern Greece and Crete, as these areas were under the cultural influence of Mycenae. During this time not only Mycenaean goods were traded in the Mediterranean, people but also adopted the Mycenaean customs. The northern border of the spread of the Mycenaean culture lies in Pieria, further north no signs have been discovered yet.⁵

Iron Age, circa 1000 to 700 BC

The coastal population grew and some Bronze Age settlements were apparently abandoned. People were more likely to settle in places offering natural protection. Existing settlements were fortified, the ancient Methone with a three-meter-high wall. Trade relations were expanded, the Phoenician alphabet introduced and modified for the Greek language.

- From Kerkira (Corfu) displaced settlers, who originally came from Eretria (Euboea), settled in the second half of the 8th century BC in the ancient Methone.
- In Methone the Greek alphabet was used.
- About 800 BC Leivithra was founded.
- Probably in the second half of the eighth century BC Homer wrote the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. He laid the foundation for Greek mythology, whose gods resided on the Olympus.

Noteworthy is the fact that in the tombs of male deceased inland Pierias always an iron spearhead was found as a burial object. That was not the case in the tombs near the coast.

Finds from this period include jewelry, pottery, weapons and tools as well as remnants of wooden grave constructions.⁶

Archaic and Classical Greek period, circa 700 to 323 BC

- The production of iron has spread across Europe.
- Hesiod wrote the *Theogony* and thus consolidated the cult of gods of ancient Greece.⁷
- About 700 BC, the Macedonian kingdom was founded.
- In the first half of the 5th century BC Alexander I introduced coinage in the Macedonian kingdom.
- 432 BC Pydna was besieged by the Athenians.⁸
- Around 424 BC Thucydides first mentioned the existence of Dion.⁹
- After the capture of Pydna by Archelaus, 410 BC, he had the city moved 20 stadia far from the coast to the inland.¹⁰
- End of the 5th century BC King Archelaus relocated the capital of the kingdom from Aegae (now Vergina) to Pella. He introduced the Olympic Games in Dion, a nine-day festival in honor of Zeus and the nine Muses.

- In the 2nd quarter of the 4th century BC, the Macedonian tombs of Katerini were built.
- In the late 4th century BC the Macedonian tombs of Korinos were built. It's assumed that they were used until the beginning of the 3rd century BC.¹¹
- 356 BC Alexander III (the Great) was born.
- 354 BC Philip II besieged and defeated Methone.¹²
- Alexander III ruled Macedonia from 336 to 323 BC. During his campaigns, he was represented by the general Antipater.
- Before starting his campaign against the Persians, Alexander sacrificed to the gods in Dion.
- After the battle of Granicus (334 BC), Alexander commissioned the respected sculptor Lysippos to make bronze statues of the 25 horsemen killed during the fighting and place them in the Zeus Olympios sanctuary, Dion.

Hellenistic period, circa 323 to 146 BC

- 323 BC Alexander the Great died.
- The Antigonids finally took over the rule in Macedonia.
- 219 BC Dion was destroyed by the Aitolians. Philip V had the city rebuilt.
- 179 BC the Macedonian King Perseus sent ambassadors to Rome in order to renew the "good relations" between the two states.
- In the same year, King Perseus initiated an extensive debt cancellation. The reason for this was a bad harvest that drove many of his subjects into indebtedness.
- 169 BC the Romans erected their army camp on the plain between Heraklion (today Platamonas) and Leivithra.
- 168 BC King Perseus was defeated at the Battle of Pydna by the Roman army commander Lucius Aemilius Paullus. Macedonia is divided into four regions, the Macedonian elite was being expelled from the country.¹³
- 148 BC with the help of an army of Thracians and the support of the native population, Andriscus tried to liberate Macedonia from the Romans. He was beaten by the Roman general Metellus. Then Rome founded its first province in the east, with Thessaloniki as the capital.¹⁴

Roman period, circa 146 BC to 330 AD

- Around 100 BC Leivithra was destroyed by a natural disaster and abandoned by its inhabitants.
- Circa 150 to 200 AD, a temple dedicated to Dionysus was built in Dion.¹⁵

- In 212 AD, Rome grants Roman citizenship to all inhabitants of the Empire.¹⁶
- In 285 AD, the empire was divided, the western Roman and eastern Roman Empires emerged.¹⁷
- In Dion, the Nonae Capratinae was held on July 7 of a year. Female slaves enjoyed certain freedoms during this festival. There was a connection between the worship of Zeus Hypsistos and the Nonae Capratinae.¹⁸

The archaeological finds from the over 1000-year period, from the end of the Iron Age to the end of the Roman rule over Pieria, are very extensive. Dion is the leading archaeological site here. Methone benefited from several years of collaboration with the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). This gave valuable insights into the beginnings of the Greek alphabet.

The finds are either displayed in museums or they are stored. The Archaeological Museum in Dion is fully equipped, in the Leivithra Park only replicas can be seen, the finds from Leivithra are stored in Dion. In the Archaeological Museum of Makrygialos smaller artifacts and clay vessels are shown. Coins, jewelry, clay and glass vessels, weapons, tools, building materials, sarcophagi, funerary steles, statues, statuettes, well enclosures, mosaics, a water organ, and many other pieces were discovered.

Byzantine period, circa 330 to 1453 AD

- 343 Dion was appointed bishopric, the basilica of the bishop was built in two stages of construction in the 4th and 5th centuries.¹⁹
- In the last quarter of the 5th century at Louloudies, located near the ancient Pydna, was built a fortified bishopric.
- Dion was last mentioned in the 10th century as an administrative district of Byzantine Emperor Konstantinos Porphyrogennetos.
- 1055, the monastery Kanalon was founded. According to the French archaeologist Heuzey, the foundation should have been done even earlier.²⁰
- In the 12th century, the name Heraklion was replaced by Platamon.²¹
- In 1204 Franconian knights, during their conquest of Constantinople, founded the kingdom of Thessaloniki, which included the castle of Platamon.
- Foundation of the monastery Agia Triada in Sparmos. Records indicate that the monastery was inhabited at least since the year 1386. The exact date is unknown, it may be older.²²

Important excavation sites of the Byzantine period are the castle of Platamonas, Louloudies and the castle of Pydna (originally a basilica), which was built by Frankish knights above the ruins of the

ancient city. Furthermore, there are numerous churches, such as the Holy Trinity (Agia Triada), located above Vrondou, and the Church Panagia in Kondariotissa.²³

The main finds from this epoch are mainly of ecclesiastical origin. They are exhibited at the Archaeological Museum of Dion, at the Museum of Byzantine Culture in Thessaloniki or in the museums of the monasteries.

Important ancient sites (from north to south):

- Methone
- Pydna
- Louloudies
- Macedonian tombs at Korinos
- Macedonian tombs at Katerini
- Dion
- Spathes
- Leivithra
- Castle of Platamonas

Archaeological sites (alphabetical order) among others:

- Aiginio
- Aiginio - Melissia
- Alykes Kitrous
- Kastania Kolindros
- Kitros
- Komboloi
- Korinos
- Krania
- Makrygialos
- Nea Agathoupoli
- Pieriki Endochora
- Pigi Artemidos
- Pigi Athinas
- Platamon Stop

- Ritini
- Sevasti
- Tria Platania
- Treis Elies
- Valtos Leptokaryas
- Xerolakki
- Xydias

The Macedonian kings

The Macedonian royal family traces its ancestry back to the Greek hero Heracles. The list begins with King Alexander I. Until his reign, the data of the government periods of his predecessors are quite inaccurate.

King	Time of his reign (all dates BC)
Alexander I	circa 498 to 454
Alcetas II	circa 454 to 448
Perdiccas II	448 to 413
Archelaus I	413 to 399
Kraterus	399
Orestes	399 to 396
Aeropus II.	399 to 396
Archelaus II	396 to 393
Pausanias	393
Amyntas II	393
Amyntas III	393
Argaeus II	393 to 392
Amyntas III	392 to 370, second period
Alexander II	370 to 368
Ptolemy of Aloros	368 to 365
Perdiccas III	365 to 359
Amyntas IV	359 to 356
Philip II	359 to 336
Alexander III (the Great)	336 to 323, Antipater ruled in Alexanders absence
Phillip III Arrhidaeus	323 to 317
Alexander IV Aigos	323 to 310

King	Time of his reign (all dates BC)
Cassander	306 to 297
Philip IV	297 to 296
Alexander V	297 to 294
Antipater I	296 to 294
Demetrios I.Poliorcetes	294 to 287
Pyrrhus	287 to 285
Lysimachos	285 to 281
Ptolemäos Keraunos	281 to 279
Meleagros	279
Antipater II	279
Sosthenes	279 to 277
Antigonus II Gonatas	277 to 239
Demetrios II Aitolikos	239 to 229
Antigonus III Doson	229 to 221
Philip V	221 to 179
Perseus	179 to 168

Ancient Sites

Map of the ancient sites



This map was created with data from the Open Street Map Foundation.

Methone, a birthplace of the Greek alphabet

Most important

- Founded in 733 BC
- Athenian colony in the Macedonian kingdom
- First testimonies of the Greek alphabet
- Destroyed by Macedonian King Philip II
- Not fully explored yet
- Coordinates: [40.467444°N](#), [22.583649°E](#)

The ruins of Methone are located north of Pydna at the shore of the Thermaic Gulf.

History

The area around Methone was inhabited since the late Neolithic (5000 to 3000 BC). Before the founding of the city Methone, a settlement already existed in this area. From the late Bronze Age (1450 to 1100 BC), contacts of the inhabitants with the southern Aegean are documented. During the early Iron Age (11th to 8th century BC) the settlement was expanded. The city gained special importance through the discovery of inscribed pottery and potsherds. It is one of the oldest testimonies of Greek writing.

According to Plutarch Methone was founded in 733/732 BC by settlers from Eretria (place on the island of Euboea).¹ Previously, they were expelled from the island of Corfu by Corinthian colonists. Originally, they wanted to return to their hometown of Eretria but were prevented there by force of arms to set a foot on the shore.² Unlike the rest of Pieria, Methone was not dominated by Macedonia but was an ally of Athens. 355/354 BC an army under the leadership of the Macedonian King Philip II besieged the city. Philip lost one eye during the fighting. After their surrender, Philip II allowed the inhabitants free withdrawal. He destroyed the city and distributed the land to Macedonians. Methone has not been historically mentioned since.

Due to the deposition of sediments, especially by the river Aliakmonas, the ancient place is today about 500 m distant from the coast. The development of the (so far known) city extends from the plateau of

the eastern hill to the summit of the western hill, around 700 BC the urban area included around 20 hectares.

Methone is assumed to be the oldest Greek colony in the northern Aegean. Due to the favorable location, it became a hub of trade with the Balkans. Since the founding of the city, there have been production sites for various goods and a trading port. The ports of Methone and Pydna became major transshipment points for the region. Noteworthy is the export of timber and tar for shipbuilding.

Excavation history

Since 1972, the place where the ancient Methone was located is known. In 2003, the excavation work began on the eastern hill, in 2006 on the western hill. They were executed under the direction of the archaeologist Mattheos Besios, of the 27th Ephorate for Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities (now Ephorate Archaeotiton Pierias).

The ground covering the ancient city is largely privately owned and used for agriculture. Tilling the soil of the fields with heavy machines has destroyed many artifacts. The exact location of the port is still unknown. The Thermaic Gulf extended then, until the beginning of the Byzantine era, to Pella. Later began the silting through the rivers Axios and Aliakmonas.

One of the most important works was the exposure of the Agora and its surrounding buildings on the west side of the eastern hill. The findings of the excavations of Methone, especially in the Ypogeio, contributed significantly to the research on the genesis and distribution of the Greek alphabet and its early use.

Archaeologists from the University of Paris in 2005, together with colleagues from Aristotle University Thessaloniki, again tried to locate the ancient port of Methone. They worked with maps of the Greek military (scale 1: 5000) and used the "Digital Elevation Model" to examine the location as accurately as possible. In this case, a mapping of the earth's surface is performed in a three-dimensional representation. Thus, 15144 geometric points were recorded, which are partially below the sea surface. The exact location of the ancient port was not found, but an infrastructure that points to a harbor.

From 2013 to 2017, a team from UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles), led by Dr. Sarah Morris and Dr. John Papadopoulos joined the excavations.

In 2013, a Greek and English language book was published to inform the public about the findings.³

Excavations

The eastern hill

In the Neolithic, the eastern hill was wider, it was washed away over the centuries from the sea. The excavated remains of buildings date from 550 to 400 BC. The area is measuring approximately 100 by 80 m. A smaller agora came to light, which was surrounded by public buildings. After a second place (agora?) was found, archaeologists assumed that instead of a central agora several smaller ones may have existed.

The Ypogeio

The Ypogeio (cellar, Greek Υπόγειο) is a more than eleven m deep pit on the crest of the eastern hill.⁴ At the bottom, it measures 3.60 by 4.20 m. Probably it should become a storeroom, which was not completed because of the instability of the hill. Around 700 BC the shaft was then filled with wooden beams, stone molds for metalworking, slag and potsherds. The ceramic remains come from different types of vessels. In addition to cookware, large amphorae and eating utensils, the remains of drinking vessels were found. The pottery came from different places of origin. In addition to local products were some from Phoenicia, Attica, Euboea, the Cyclades and Ionia. The nature and period of manufacture confirm Plutarch's assertion that Methone was founded around 733 BC. The rich finds show that Macedonia was not to see as a peripheral area of the Greek world.⁵

Among the artifacts were 191 remnants of clay pots that are painted and/or bear markings or characters. Among them are 25 vessels, which are labeled and partially provided with symbols.

They belong to the oldest, so far discovered, Greek and Macedonian writings. The characters were engraved or painted and were usually applied before firing the ceramic. According to archaeologists, the various types of inscriptions, carefully or rather negligently, indicate that writing was not only the privilege of professional writers but was, also popular among the population. On the pottery in addition to the name of the owner, also sentences or small poems were written.

The Greeks used the Phoenician alphabet to write and transformed it according to their needs. The most common style of writing was from right to left (sinistrograde). But also from left to right (dextrograde) or line by line the direction changing (boustrophedon) type of writing were common.

The western hill

This hill is slightly higher than the eastern hill. Since the late Bronze Age, the necropolis of an ancient settlement was located here. Around 900 BC was begun with the overbuilding of the cemetery with residential houses. This was done without taking care of the existing graves. The stone foundations of some houses even cut up skeletons. The buildings themselves were built with bricks, a city wall protected the settlement. To improve their defense against enemies, a ditch was created outside the walls to effectively raise the wall. So far, three tunnels have been discovered, which allowed the residents to leave the city. Presumably, in times of siege, they also served to supply the city. Furthermore, kilns and remains of other crafts were found.

The army camp of Philip II was located about 500 meters south of Methone.

Pydna, and the end of the Macedonian kingdom

Most important

- Protagonists of the Macedonian kingdom and the Roman Empire shaped the fate of Pydna: Archelaus, Philip II, Cassander, Olympias, Perseus, Lucius Aemilius Paullus, Andriscus, Metellus.
- As a result of the lost Battle of Pydna, Macedonia becomes a province of Rome.
- Necropolises. An image of the life and death of that time
- Not fully explored yet
- Coordinates: [40.397465°N](#), [22.617359°E](#)

Pydna is located directly on the Aegean Sea, 16 km northeast of Katerini and 2.5 km south of the village Makrygialos.

History

Pydna was first mentioned by the Greek historian Thucydides and gained importance during the Peloponnesian war.¹ The Athenians besieged Pydna in 432 BC.² King Archelaus I of Macedonia besieged the city around 410 BC from the land side, while the Athenian fleet took over the siege from the seaside. After Pydna was taken, Archelaus had moved the city 20 stadia (1 stadion = 600 feet (about 183 m)) far inland, in the area of today's Kitros.³ After Archelaus death, the inhabitants moved back to their old place near the sea. 357 or 356 BC King Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great, conquered the city. 317 BC, Philips widow, Olympias, the mother of Alexander, was killed after the capture of Pydna by King Cassander.⁴

Pydna first minted coins in the late 6th century BC. Further coins were discovered from the period between 389 and 379 BC.⁵

Between the 6th and 7th century AD, Pydna was renamed Kitros. It was the most important city of Pieria until the 14th century.

In 1204 Franks took the city after a siege. They turned the Episcopal church into a castle and built a tower where their commander-in-chief, Virich von Daum, resided.

In the 14th century, the inhabitants left the place and settled in today's Kitros.

The Battle of Pydna

After the Romans failed to defeat Macedonia in two wars, it came on June 22, 168 BC to the decisive fight near Pydna and Louloudies. It's said that on the Macedonian side, also Thracian and Illyrian soldiers fought.⁶

With around 40,000 men, both forces had roughly the same strength.

King Perseus commanded the Macedonian units. The phalanx provided the bulk of the army.⁷ The cavalry and infantry were also involved in the fighting.

The general Lucius Aemilius Paullus led the Roman army. Using the manipular tactic, the Romans fought more agile and were more flexible.⁸ This tactic allowed the centurions to adapt the combat mode of their soldiers to the course of a battle. Weaknesses of the opponent were exploited immediately.

At the center of the Macedonian battle order stood the phalanx. Left and right of her fought the infantry, which in turn was flanked by the cavalry.

The Roman troop order was almost congruent with the Macedonian. Instead of the phalanx, however, stood the Manipular Phalanx with its flexible tactics. She was supported by war elephants.

At first, the Macedonians retained the upper hand. The Roman soldiers failed to avoid the long lances of the phalanx. Luck turned when the advancing Macedonian phalangites reached uneven, hilly terrain. The men were no longer able to keep their ranks closed. In the resulting gaps, the Romans pushed forward and were due to their maneuverability at an advantage.

The battle ended with the victory of the Roman troops, whose losses were relatively small. About 20,000 Macedonian soldiers were killed. Thousands of the survivors were captured and enslaved. King Perseus was able to escape at first. However, the Romans seized him, and he was presented by Lucius Aemilius Paullus as a trophy on his triumphal procession in Rome. Perseus died a few years later in captivity. Lucius Aemilius Paullus was given the byname "Macedonicus".

Excavations

At the site of ancient Pydna, no intensive excavations have been carried out yet. The visible building remains date from the Byzantine era. The remnants of the city from the Classical, Hellenistic and possibly pre-Greek times are partially under these ruins. The entire complex measures 320 by 130 m.

As early as the Mycenaean period (circa 1400 BC) settlements were found in the hills north of the excavation site. From 1000 till about 600 BC, the area was inhabited by Thracians. However, the settlement remains are no longer completely preserved, because the eastern part of the settlement has slipped into the sea.

The city wall was built in the 5th century BC. Sections of it are located 500 meters north of the archaeological site. The exact course of the wall is unknown yet. During excavation work parts of the wall were discovered occasionally. The bulwark was not made of stone, but of clay. After taking the city, Philip II had the city wall destroyed.

The Christianization of Pydna began in the 4th century. At this time, the first basilica was built. At the beginning of the 6th century, a second building was erected. The last built basilica was burnt down after an attack by the Bulgarians. At the end of the 10th century, a much larger basilica was built in its place. It measured 23.20 times 16.60 m. It was decorated with frescoes and the floor was covered with mosaic. As already mentioned, in 1204 Franconian knights altered the building into a fortress. They drilled a 22 m deep well and stored supplies. An example is an amphora where olive oil was stored in. Furthermore, they built a cistern. An underground passage should allow the crew of the castle in an emergency to escape to the outside.

In the sea-facing apse was a phryctoria, a device for exchanging signals with the opposite peninsula of Chalkidiki.⁹ With torches, light signals were transmitted over greater distances. So messages could be transmitted quickly over hundreds of kilometers.

Spolia (remains and fragments of columns, etc.) were worked into the wall surrounding the site. It was built in two phases. In the 6th century AD, at the time of Justinian I, the first phase of construction took place. It was enlarged in the 10th century and some of the gates were closed. The wall is about 1.40 m thick and was reinforced by rectangular towers. Some remnants of the complex date from the 16th century, the period of occupation of Greece by the Ottomans.

West of the road that once connected Pydna with Dion, the remains of the city walls and a city gate can be seen. Today's course of the traffic route is largely identical to that of the antique road.

About 180 meters south of the basilicas parts of a Byzantine settlement were discovered, dating back to the 12th century. It is an inn with courtyard, a bathroom, foundations of some houses, a cemetery, a small church and two kilns. The bathroom was a rectangular building with dimensions of 7.50 by 2.90 m, the walls are still up to a height of 1.10 m. West of it, the remains of the inn were uncovered. The floor plan measures 14.50 by 5.15 m. Furthermore, a house existed on the northern wall. The basic dimensions are 11.50 by 5.50 m. The settlement was abandoned by the inhabitants in the late 12th century or early 13th century. The inn was later used as a pottery workshop.

The necropolises

In the environment of ancient Pydna and on the road to Dion are some Macedonian tombs and the necropolises. According to ancient customs, the cemeteries were built along the roads and near the city gates.¹⁰ The oldest tombs are from the Bronze Age, the earliest ones from the early Christian period. Minor tumuli (burial mounds) have been eroded over the centuries and are now no longer visible. Most of the works had to be carried out as rescue excavations. The finds, both in ancient Pydna and in the necropolises, show a shrinking population during the period of the second Greek colonization.¹¹

In the necropolises, the change of the rites and the funeral customs over time can be observed. There were mostly earth burials, cremation of the deceased was rare. The dead were either burned directly in the grave or on wooden platforms. In some cases, the ashes were buried in copper kettles or clay pots. Toddlers were sometimes buried in common clay pots, which were broken for this purpose, and reassembled after embedding the body. In the 5th century BC, male corpses were buried with their head to the west, females with their head to the east. In the skulls of many of the deceased was the so-called Charon's obol. He was put under the tongue of the dead. He served to pay the ferryman Charon for the transfer of the dead to Hades. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, cremations were even rarer than in the Classical period. Remains of wooden coffins are sometimes painted in blue and red. The graves from the middle of the 4th century BC have lesser grave goods than those created before or after. Archaeologists attribute this fact back to economically difficult times.

The shape of the tombs ranges from simple pits to Macedonian and Thracian tombs with dromos (access) and several chambers. Partly, the arrangement points to family tombs. The most complex is the design of the monumental Macedonian tombs. The soils of the simple graves were sprinkled with gravel or sand. Often, wooden boards were used as grave borders. Single square tombs testify that the remains of some of the deceased were reburied later. Six of the discovered tombs were built in Mycenaean style.¹²

Grave goods

In addition to pottery, jewelry, weapons and tools, also richly decorated glass vessels came to light. The vessels were imported mainly from Attica, occasionally from Corinth or other places of the Aegean, some come from local production. Deceased children were often given clay figures. The jewelry is usually made of bronze, iron or silver, some are made of bone or gold. In the graves of male deceased weapons were found only in rare cases. Small vessels made of glass or alabaster, which were added to the corpses of women, are usually in good condition. Some of the finds are exhibited in the Archaeological Museum of Makrygiolos, most of them in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.^{13,14,15}

Northern necropolis

At three ancient roads, around 3000 tombs from the Classical and Hellenistic periods have been discovered so far. It is the largest and most intensively used burial ground of Pydna. The youngest graves are used until the year 146 BC. Since the graves are mainly in an agricultural area, they were mapped after the excavation, photographed and, after the grave goods were removed, filled with soil again. Part of the cemeteries is now covered by the route of the Athens — Thessaloniki motorway and the railway line. So it happens that the northern necropolis is largely invisible under the ground. The arable land is used by the farmers for agriculture again. Only monumental individual graves are still open. They were protected against weathering by roof structures.

The simple graves were often untouched when archaeologists found them. In contrast to the Macedonian burial mounds, which were often plundered already in the antiquity, besides the bones of the deceased usually, the grave goods were present.

In the spring of 2001, a mass grave from the 4th century BC was discovered. It hid the skeletons of at least 120 people who were buried in a pit. The grave was used several times, it was reopened at least three times. The dead were thrown carelessly over each other, obviously, the bodies should disappear quickly. The deceased were men, women, adolescents and children.

A burial mound, some 500 m north of the ramparts of ancient Pydna, contained tombs from the 5th and 4th centuries BC. Most of them were still intact. In the graves were rich grave goods, the women had been given with valuable glass vessels and gold and silver jewelry. The men were given swords, lances, helmets and drinking vessels.¹⁶

Southern necropolis

Near the salt mines of Kitros lies the southern necropolis of Pydna. It is much smaller than the northern cemetery, but the tombs are more magnificent. Archaeologists assume that there were buried here the wealthier inhabitants of Pydna. The excavations began in 1984 and, after several breaks, ended in 2003. The oldest graves date back to 350 BC, the last ones were built 146 BC. They thus represent a long period of Macedonian burial culture.

On a field (Chrysochoidis field), an extensive Macedonian burial site holds several corpses. A single-chamber grave was used over a longer period, probably the members of a family were buried there. The men belonged to the Macedonian horse troop and thus had a significant military rank. The tomb was built in the late 4th century or the early 3rd century BC. It was reserved for the burial of adults, children were buried outside. To the middle of the 2nd century BC, individual tombs were laid around the single-chamber tomb. In them, the remains of adults were found. They may have been victims of the Battle of Pydna or the Roman conquest during the founding of the first Roman province in the east (148 BC).

The three most important phases:

- From 350 BC until the reign of King Antigonus Gonatas (276-239 BC) the largest and most magnificent tombs were built in this period. Some were used (probably by families) for decades.
- From the beginning of the 3rd century BC, Macedonian single-chamber tombs were preferred in which sometimes several people were buried. This type was kept until the first half of the 2nd century BC.
- From the second half of the 2nd century BC, individual graves predominated.

Most of the tombs were still untouched. Within the already robbed were still non-metallic objects. The robbers were obviously only interested in the precious metals (possibly weapons). Noteworthy is the grave of a doctor who included medical instruments as burial objects.¹⁷

Louloudies, once a magnificent Byzantine fortress

Most important:

- Episcopal seat from Byzantine times
- Fortress and art
- Mosaics
- Graves with mural paintings
- Coordinates: [40.343402°N, 22.6008151°E](#)

The complex is 2.6 km northeast of the Macedonian tombs of Korinos and 5.8 km south of ancient Pydna. Mid-19th century, the French archaeologist Léon Heuzey located the hills northwest of Louloudies as the place where 168 BC the Battle of Pydna took place. ¹

History

In the course of the reconstruction of the railway line Athens — Thessaloniki a fortified bishop seat from Byzantine time was excavated in the area Louloudies. The place was permanently populated since the Mycenaean period until the 7th century AD. It had the character of a village that served as a station between Thessaloniki and Larissa.

The Goths besieged Thessaloniki in 479 AD. In order to avert damage to the city, the magistrate agreed with the besiegers to place some other Macedonian cities under Gothic supervision. Among them were Pella, Pydna, Dion and Veria. Pydna (Kitros) was appointed bishopric, but the bishop resided in Louloudies.²

The fortress-like complex was built in the last quarter of the 5th century. It is probably the same area that was called Anamon in Roman records. In the middle of the 6th century, the buildings were destroyed by an earthquake. The bishop left the place, which was later used as a cemetery. In the 7th century, Louloudies was finally abandoned after attacks by “barbarians”.

The facility

The entire complex has a ground area of 80 by 90 m. It was surrounded by a wall. For its defense, four rectangular towers were built, which were at the corners of the bailey. A double gate on the west side was integrated into the wall. The outer gate was provided with a portcullis. On the threshold, one can still see the traces of vehicles that used to drive here. In the first construction phase, a three-aisled basilica (floor plan 35.50 by 19 m) and a residence for the bishop were built. Striking were the reception and the porticos of the building. The floors are decorated with mosaic. Under the palace were found remnants of a villa from the early 4th century BC. During the reign of Justinian I (527-567 AD), the complex and the premises were expanded. Facilities for the production of wine and olive oil have been established and two warehouses have been built in the southwest corner. Another depot was near the west tower, outside the defensive walls.

Archaeologists discovered eight individual graves. They have a vaulted ceiling, partly the beautiful painting has been preserved. Furthermore, a larger number of simple graves were discovered, which date from the 3rd to 6th century AD.

Excavations

The works took place from 1993 to 1997 and were led by the Byzantine Antiquities Authority in Thessaloniki.³ The railway line divides the excavation site diagonally. The remains of the western defense tower and a section of the wall are located outside the accessible area.⁴

Numerous finds bring some light to the period between the 4th and the 7th century AD, an era in which little information is available for this part of Macedonia. They bear witness to the significance of the bishopric and give hints on the daily life and the existing technology of this time. After the place was finally abandoned by its inhabitants, workshops settled down. A sculpture workshop, remnants of a kiln for pottery and melting furnaces for glass products and for metal were found.

Macedonian tombs at Korinos

Most important

- Monumental graves at the Olympus
- Many of the grave goods are in the Louvre, in Paris.
- Coordinates: [40.326351°N](#), [22.579930°E](#)

The burial mounds (tumuli) are located east (A) and west (B) of the Athens — Thessaloniki highway, about 600 meters northwest of the outskirts of the village of Korinos. About 5.5 km to the southwest, another, an older Macedonian burial site was found near Katerini.

Excavation history

The French archaeologist Léon Heuzey discovered grave A during his trip to Greece in 1855. The first description of the site was made in 1860. The excavations began a year later. Together with Honoré Domet Heuzey published his findings in 1876. A second, smaller tomb (B) was uncovered at the end of the 20th century.

The archaeologist Matheos Besios reopened grave A in 1991. In the same year, he discovered grave B. The archaeologists Hans v. Mangoldt and Konstantinos Noulas took an exact survey of both tombs.

Both burial chambers had already been looted by robbers. These had removed the keystones of the vaults and thus gained access. Who was buried here is unknown but the elaborate construction points to significant people. Heuzey had moved almost all utilizable and transportable artifacts (except for a stone block with the relief of a snake, two doors and smaller finds) to France. They are either exhibited or stored there in the Louvre, in Paris. The exact building-date of the grave vault was controversial. The assumed period of construction extends from the 4th century BC (Richter) until the early 2nd century BC (Miller).¹ Recent findings point to the construction of tombs in the late 4th century BC and their use until the beginning of the 3rd century BC.²

Excavations

Both tombs are clearly recognizable as burial mounds. They are overgrown with grass and pine trees. Both tombs are not located in the center of the tumulus, they were each left of the main axis (seen from the entrance), probably to deceive grave robbers. As it was customary in Macedonia at that time, the buildings were erected during the lifetime of the person(s) later to be buried in.³

Grave A

It is located directly at the motorway service area Korinos and is accessible from there. The hill has a diameter of 60 m and a height of 15 m. The total length of the tomb is 22 m. This is the largest Macedonian tomb ever discovered in Pieria so far.⁴ The outer entrance, which is over four meters long, was filled with mud, bricks or stones on both sides; the individual layers can be easily distinguished. The facade is only partially preserved and has been reconstructed. Heuzey had found her still intact. The tomb was once closed by a wall and behind it, by marble gates, these are modeled like wooden doors. There are imaginary fittings and nails to recognize. Both doors are still preserved. Recesses indicate that originally bronze rings were attached to it. The passage (dromos) leads to the first antechamber, it has a clear slope and diminishes in height. It is built of stone blocks that were once plastered. The ceiling is rounded (round barrel) and closed at its highest point with headstones. Colored remnants show that the plaster was once painted. The painting imitated a marble structure. The floor of the corridor consists of a pebble mosaic pavement.⁵

The approximately 11 m long and 2 m wide Dromos opens into a forecourt (courtyard), which is decorated by a Doric entablature and a frieze with six triglyphs. He was painted, remains of red paint are clearly visible. An opening leads from the courtyard into the 1.5 m long and 3 m wide antechamber of the tomb.

The 3 x 4 m burial chamber itself was protected by heavy gates. To make it easier to open, a mechanical device helped. The forecourt, the antechamber and the burial chamber are covered by a common vault.

It is believed that a couple was buried here. A dog guarded the kline, which is probably assigned to the man, the second kline was protected by a snake. The chamber was plastered and painted, there are holders for grave goods.⁶ Only the bones of the deceased, potsherds and an oil lamp were found.

As inscriptions (from 1948 onwards) show, the grave was used at times by herdsmen to house their animals.

Grave B

The smaller grave B is located west of the highway and south of the motorway service area Korinos. It is accessible from a parallel street. The tumulus has a diameter of 40 m and is 13 m high.⁷ The tomb consists of a vaulted corridor, a 1.5 by 3 m measuring antechamber and the 3 by 3 m burial chamber. The antechamber was secured by a wall and a double-winged gate. The gate was broken, restored and mounted again. It was carved out of limestone, was once plastered and is very heavy. The floors of the antechamber and the tomb are covered with flagstones, the walls are decorated with a meander.

In the burial chamber remains of a cremation and a body burial were discovered. Preserved are stone bases, on which presumably wooden couches rested. The chamber is painted with a circumferential frieze. As remaining grave goods two bronze coins, two leg protections, ceramics and fragments of other objects were found. On the walls and the ceiling mounts for other grave goods are attached.⁸

Macedonian tombs at Katerini

Most important

- Architectural forerunner of the Macedonian tombs at Korinos
- A member of the Hetairoi was buried here
- Well preserved marble doors
- Coordinates: [40.291014°N, 22.533839°E](#)

The tombs are located 3.7 km northeast of the center of Katerini at the Athens — Thessaloniki motorway, immediately north of the junction Katerini-Nord.¹

Excavations

North of Katerini, two Macedonian tombs (tomb A and B) were discovered. By the end of the 1960s, the remains of a kiln and a building had been found. Other structures were destroyed by dredging, whereby parts of a burial chamber were found. The excavation of both graves took place in May 1977. Grave A is one of the earliest known examples of Macedonian tombs. It was built in the 2nd quarter of the 4th century BC. The shape of tomb B was in use throughout the 4th century BC. Both were built from precisely manufactured limestone monoliths, are plastered inside and painted. They are covered flat and have neither access (dromos) nor the usual vaulted ceiling. In both burial places, the stone roof structure was partly removed, so that one has a good view from above. Access to the tombs is not possible. Roof constructions protect both graves from weathering. Although both graves were robbed, archaeologists still found impressive grave goods.

In 2010, the excavations were resumed. The finds are currently (2019) exhibited in the Archaeological Museum in Dion.

Grave A

The western grave has an antechamber and a burial chamber. Due to the design and equipment, it is considered a transitional form from simple graves to the Macedonian tombs. The two chambers were separated by a double-winged marble door, which is completely preserved. The door was made, as in the neighboring tumuli of Korinos, as a faux wood door. Thus, iron bands and their attachment are imitated. The floor is covered with stone slabs. The plaster of the interior walls is painted. In the burial chamber are remnants of a stone Kline, on which the deceased was bedded.

To stabilize the marble doors, they are supported by wooden struts and metal bars.

Grave B

The smaller, eastern grave is designed as a single-chamber grave. It was adorned by a two-tone painting. The plaster of the upper layer of the monolithic masonry is painted with yellow paint. The underlying ashlar blocks were decorated with red paint. The floor is laid out with stone plates.

The body of the deceased was cremated on a platform. He was a member of the Hetairoi, these were aristocrats who fought as elite cavalry in battle.² The remaining bones of the dead were buried in an urn, which was then placed in the tomb. The remainder of the incineration was distributed around the grave.

Dion, the religious center of Macedonia

Most important

- One of the most important ancient Greek sites
- Founded in the 5th century BC, for around thousand years inhabited
- Sanctuaries and buildings from the Classical to the Byzantine period
- In the 5th century AD, the city was abandoned by its inhabitants.
- Despite decades of excavation, Dion has not been fully explored.
- Under the link: <http://www.ancientdion.org> a virtual tour of the Archaeological Park is offered online.
- Coordinates: [40.176410°N, 22.493415°E](#)

Dion is located on the northeastern edge of Mount Olympus. It is five kilometers distant from the sea. In the Hellenistic period, the distance was only 1.5 km. Dion is connected to the Thermaic Gulf by the once navigable river Vaphyras.

The Archaeological Park

The park covers an area of 150 hectares, of which almost 50 hectares are urban and about 50 hectares are sanctuaries. A lot of the area has not yet been archaeologically explored. In the Archaeological Park, sanctuaries and monuments from the Classical, Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods were found. Residential buildings, a marketplace, public buildings, churches, bathhouses, shops, workshops and toilets have been found in the former urban area. Outside are the sanctuaries, the theaters and the cemeteries.

History

424 BC Thucydides described Dion as the first city reached by the spartan general Brasidas, coming from Thessaly (Tempi), to Macedonia.¹ Pausanias mentioned Dion as one of the places where Orpheus lived.² In the Classical period, Dion became the religious center of Macedonia. Zeus was worshiped

here and the Olympic Games in honor of Zeus and the Muses were held. The responsibility for the majestic rituals lay with the royal court in Pella. The kings received foreign visitors at the festivities and celebrated with their court. Philip II honored the best actors personally. Alexander the Great had a tent set up for his entourage and took care of his officers during the festivities. Dion attained by the sanctuary certain importance within Greece and developed into a city. Alexander the Great made a sacrifice at the Zeus sanctuary before he began his campaign against the Persians. Later he had set up 25 bronze statues of the cavalymen, killed in the Battle of Granicus, in the Zeus Olympios sanctuary. They were crafted by the respected sculptor Lysippos. In the year 148 BC, the Roman L. Caecilius Metellus had these statues transported to Rome to celebrate his victory over the Macedonians. There they were exhibited on Campus Martius.

219 BC Dion was destroyed by the Aitolians. Philip V had the city rebuilt immediately. The Romans took it 169 BC. Gradually, Roman settlers came to Dion and brought with them their ministry, their measures and weight units. Octavian declared 31 BC Dion to a colony that was exempt from tax payments and had a certain autonomy.

After the middle of the 3rd century AD, the decline started by raids of neighboring tribes, earthquakes and floods. In the 4th century AD, Dion (Dium) last flourished when it became a bishopric. The place was last mentioned as an administrative district of the Byzantine emperor Konstantinos Porphyrogenetos (Constantine VII) in the 10th century.

Excavation history

At the end of the 18th century, the French consul, Felix de Beaujour, visited ancient Dion without knowing the site, which was abandoned and covered with the remains of buildings and columns.

In December 1806, the English explorer William M. Leake traveled to Dion. He identified the ruins near the village of Malathria, a small village inhabited by farmers and ranchers, who called the ancient place "Kastro", castle. He recognized among the vegetation the Hellenistic theater, the stadium and pieces of the city wall. The French archaeologist Léon Heuzey confirmed the discovery in 1855. He mapped parts of the wall, discovered the foundations of some towers and wrote down the inscriptions of exposed gravestones.

From 1912, the year of the liberation of Macedonia from the Ottomans, more attention was paid to ancient Dion. The archaeologist G. P. Oikonomos collected and published all the inscriptions he found around the city.

The professor of archaeology and rector of the University of Thessaloniki, Georgios Sotiriadis, began in June 1928 with the first excavations. The goal was to find the sanctuary of Zeus Olympios. He found and examined several of the tumuli within the city walls. Also, a basilica from early Christian times came to light. The suggestion that there was a temple under the basilica turned out to be deceptive after digging five meters deep. The most important find of this first excavation period was a Macedonian burial vault from the 4th century BC, that had already been looted in ancient times by grave robbers. The work lasted until 1931.

Charalambos Makaronas found a second Macedonian tomb in 1955. A third was discovered a year later.

Georgios Bakalakis resumed the work in 1961. During the mapping of the previously known archaeological site, a large part of the city walls and the defense towers were identified in 1962 and the Roman theater was located southeast of the Hellenistic theater. Stylianos Pelekanidis finished the excavations at the basilica.

From the summer of 1973, Professor Dimitrios Pandermalis (University of Thessaloniki) took over the direction of the excavations. His first goal was to explore the remains of two buildings south of the city. The excavations brought the Demeter sanctuary to light. In the same year the find of statues of Asclepius, Hygeia and Telesphoros proved the fact that the Asclepius cult was also practiced in Dion. The gallery of the armor and shields were uncovered. In the following years, the orchestra of the Hellenistic theater was liberated from the layer of earth above. The theater originally dates from the 5th century BC.

In the summer of 1976, archaeologists dug within the city walls, in the southeastern sector. They found the biggest thermal baths of the city. This thermae had obviously been destroyed by an earthquake. The mosaic of a bull in the frigidarium (cooling pool) was divided into two pieces, of which the lower part is considerably lower than the upper one. On the northern side of the baths, statues of the children of Asclepius were excavated.

Under difficult conditions, archaeologists worked on the Isis sanctuary. Water and mud caused the frequent collapse of the trenches. To continue the work, a barrier was built. The works showed signs of destruction by an earthquake with subsequent flooding. The completion of the excavations took place in 1984.

In June 1987, the Dionysus mosaic was exposed and then protected by a roof construction.

1989 it was possible to date the late city wall to the time of the reign of Theodosius I (379 to 395).

1990, drainage work was carried out at the Isis sanctuary to drain off excess water. In the villa of Dionysus, the excavation work was continued. In addition to pieces of sculptures, one found a pebble-covered mosaic, which represents the head of Medusa. The odeion, part of the big Roman thermae, was completely uncovered and surveyed. In the cemetery church, two graves were found.

In 1991, near the Asclepius sanctuary, the remains of a wall were discovered. They are stretching 120 meters to the south. It could have been part of the enclosure that originally surrounded Dion's shrines. The work in the villa of Dionysus was continued. Archaeologists examined further parts of the Roman bath and its hypocaust heating.

In the villas Zosa and Leda, on the southern edge of the city, a marble table and a sculpture showing Zeus as a swan in an erotic embrace with Leda were found in 1994. A relief was discovered that represents the image of a Nabla for the first time. It is a string instrument of Phoenician origin.

The stadium was excavated in 1995 under the direction of Georgios Karadedos. Next to the pitch, several rows of clay seats were discovered.

To protect the Isis sanctuary after flooding the Archaeological Park in 2002, it was decided to move the riverbed of the Vaphyras river a few meters to the west. It was hoped that future floods would no longer harm the sanctuary. Gradually, artifacts came to light that eventually led to the excavation of the sanctuary of Zeus Hypsistos, the almighty God. As the work came to its end, the cult statue of Zeus Hypsistos was found in the mud.

In 2007, Semeli Pingiatoglou took over responsibility for the excavations in Dion.

The Dionysus mosaic was removed in 2015 from its original site and relocated to the archaeotheke.

The moving of the Vaphyras proved to be inadequate. In the winter of 2017, the sanctuary of Isis has flooded again. The mass of water was so strong that a steel bridge was torn away.

In 2018, the damage was partially repaired. The shrines of Isis and Zeus Hypsistos were freed from plants.

Excavations continue to this day under the direction of the University of Thessaloniki.³

The sanctuaries

Vaphyras

Although no separate sanctuary was built for him, the river Vaphyras was considered a deity.⁴ Its source gushes about 100 meters east of the park entrance. Here probably grew the sacred grove of the Muses. The head of a statue, representing the personified river, was found in the source area. According to Hesiod, the Vaphyras springs from the cosmic stream Okeanos, which is ruled by the primeval goddess Tethys.⁵

The Vaphyras is closely interwoven in Greek mythology with Orpheus and the Muses. In the 2nd century AD, Pausanias wrote that the upper reaches of the Vaphyras bore the name Helikon.⁶ For two-thirds of its length, the river runs underground before reappearing in Dion. That was not always the case, according to Pausanias. The inhabitants of Dion claimed that once the Helikon had flown along Dion. But when the women who had killed Orpheus tried to wash the blood off their hands in the Helikon, the river dried up, because he did not want to have any part in this deed. In Dion, he did reappear on the surface.

Demeter sanctuary

It consisted of several temples. The believers worshiped the goddess from archaic age to the era of the Roman Empire. In the immediate vicinity is the sanctuary of Asclepius. The connection of both places of worship also exists in other archaeological sites in Greece.

In an open but walled room, the goddess was offered liquid sacrifices. From here come the oldest finds of the sanctuary. End of the 4th century BC two Doric temples replaced the previous archaic buildings. Smaller buildings were dedicated to the deities of the earth such as Baubo and Kourotrophos. From them, the population requested rich crop yields. Another temple served the worship of Aphrodite. The believers hoped for help to increase their fertility. In front of the buildings were altars on which sacrifices were made to the chthonic (in the underworld living) deities. Herbal sacrifices, such as cereals or fruit, were spread on so-called cult tables. Archaeological finds and records assign water to an important role in the Demeter cult. It was a duty of the priestesses to ensure that always pure water was available. In addition to its use in cleaning rituals, it was of course seen as a necessary good to allow the growth of the plants. Two circular fountains are among the oldest buildings of the sanctuary.

In addition to the usual finds, such as statues, potsherds, jewelry, oil lamps, etc., was a ringstone from Mycenaean times. It dates from the 15th to the 14th century BC and shows a schematically represented lion in front of a tree. The artifact gives an indication of the earlier settlement of Dion.⁷ In 1990, the foundations of an altar were found east of the temple. At this point in 1973, the head of a statue of the goddess was recovered.⁸

In late antiquity, kilns were operated on the site of the Demeter sanctuary. They were used to make building material (bricks, etc.). Furthermore, a workshop was built, which produced objects of daily use and for the cult practices in the sanctuaries.

Asclepius sanctuary

The Asclepion dates from the 4th century BC. Deliberately, a place was chosen for it which there was enough water. It played a special role in the practice of Asclepius cult and was needed for religious activities. So far, the foundations of a building have been exposed, which consisted of two rooms. The discovery of a toilet near the sanctuary indicates that people (pilgrims) spent some time there.

Zeus Hypsistos sanctuary

A road led to the sanctuary of Zeus-Hypsistos. It was lined by small pillars, with marble eagles on their top. The street led to a square where a temple stood, in which several rooms existed. In the northernmost room, the Zeus Temple, there was a statue of Zeus Hypsistos and the figure of a marble eagle. The floor around the statue was decorated with mosaics, of which the image of two ravens can still be seen. The floor of the building itself was also covered with mosaic. Here a white bull and double axes were preserved. On the western side, there is a pool of water. In front of the temple are the remains of an altar. A metal ring was fastened on it, which served to tie up the sacrificial animals. Both gods, Zeus Hypsistos and Zeus Olympios, were worshiped simultaneously. While Olympios ruled the people from the summit of Olympus, Hypsistos dominated the sky, everything supernatural.

Nonae Capratinae

After the Roman conquest of Dion, the Nonae Capratinae was held on 7th July of the year. Female slaves enjoyed certain freedoms during this festival. One of them received the rights of Agoranomos that day. The Agoranomos (composed of the two Greek words agora, market, and nomos, law) supervised the trading in the market place, set prices and had other tasks. From the inscription of an eagle statuette found in the sanctuary of Zeus Hypsistos in September 2003, it appears that Arura, the servant (probably a slave) of Plutiades, was elected Agoranomos. This statuette is the first proof that the Nonae Capratinae was also celebrated in the Roman provinces.⁹

Zeus Olympios sanctuary

In a sacred grove dedicated to Zeus stood a mighty temple. In this sanctuary, gilded statues of the Macedonian kings were erected. The 25 bronze statues donated by Alexander the Great in memorial to his cavalymen killed in the Battle of Granicus were also in the building. The central square within the site was occupied by a 22-meter altar. On metal rings, sacrificial animals were tied. At the sacrificial celebrations (Hecatomb), the most important part of the Zeus cult, the god was sacrificed 100 cattle. In their attack on Dion, the Aitolians destroyed the sanctuary. It was immediately rebuilt. Remains of the wall, surrounding the site, are still preserved.

The Zeus cult in Dion

Dion was the religious center of Macedonia. At the time of the reign of the Macedonian kings, the temple of Zeus Olympios was the most important sanctuary in the city. It is not yet clear whether Dion got its meaning from the Olympic Games initiated by King Archelaus, or whether, perhaps inspired by Homer's Iliad, it already had a central role for the region. Deukalion claimed that after the sanctuary of Zeus Lykaios, the second oldest altar dedicated to Zeus was erected in Dion. From the late 8th century BC Zeus was worshiped in various parts of Greece. All these venerations had in common that they took place on the top of a mountain, or near a mountain. Inscriptions, clay pots and remnants of charcoal from the Hellenistic and Roman periods on peak Agios Antonios (2817 m) near Dion, testify that the cult of Zeus was practiced not only in Dion itself. The Macedonian kings used the temple complex to archive their royal decrees. Some of them are exhibited in the Archaeological Museum of Dion.¹⁰

Isis sanctuary

The youngest of the sanctuaries in Dion is the sanctuary of Isis. It was not built until the 2nd century AD on the site of a former fertility sanctuary. It has a considerable size and is crossed by a channel that symbolizes the Nile. The main entrance is in the east, a smaller entrance is located on the north side of the sanctuary. The temple and altar of Isis Lochia (Isis as guardian of the child bed) are framed in the western part by two temples of Isis Tyche and Aphrodite Hypolympiada. In the ground, a basin is embedded, from which sources still spring. In the cult of the Isis, the water took on a sacred significance. In a room, to the north of the temple complex, statues of the patrons of the sanctuary were set up.

The ancient city

We have to consider that in Dion one encounters the remnants of different epochs. Although we can also find ruins from the Classical and Hellenistic period outside the city, Roman monuments and buildings from early Christianity dominate within the city walls. The remnants of much older buildings may be beneath these.

The stadium

Although known since the discovery by William M. Leake, the excavations of the stadium didn't take place until 1995. Like the theater, the stadium played an important role during the Olympic Games held in Dion. During the excavations, many coins were found, the elders are from the time of Alexander I. After the Second World War, the inhabitants of Malathria (then the name of the village, today Dion) expanded the agricultural land and their settlement area. So as the village expanded, the western part of the stadium was overbuilt.

The theaters

Hellenistic theater

Architecture

It is the largest structure of the Archaeological Park.¹¹ The shape of the theater corresponds to the typical Hellenistic style of construction. It is an open-air theater built in a north-east direction on the slope of a low hill. The orchestra was built on clay soil and was surrounded by a trench to drain the rainwater. The actors could cross the drainage over two bridges. The orchestra has a diameter of about 26 m. The stage was probably made of wood and was a bit higher than the current stage. Underneath the orchestra, an underground corridor was connecting two rooms.

Unique among the Hellenistic theaters was the kind of the seats of the auditorium, the koilon. The semicircular rows of seats were covered with 50 by 50 cm clay bricks, the seats had a height of 25 cm. The current form of the building is the result of a modern reconstruction on the antique foundations.¹² The rows of seats in the spectator area are now covered with wooden boards.

History

The theater was built during the Hellenistic period, probably during the reign of King Philip V.¹³ At the same place was previously a theater, which was probably destroyed at the raid of the Aitolians. Inside the building, a larger amount of coins from the reign of Philip V was found. In Roman times, useful building materials were removed and used to build the Roman theater, near the sanctuary of Zeus Olympios.

King Archelaus held a nine-day festival in Dion in honor of the nine Pieric Muses, which also included theater competitions. He invited the Athenian playwright Euripides to Dion, who wrote here the dramas Archelaus and the Bacchae. Both works were probably, also performed in Dion.¹⁴

After completion of all renovations, the theater has been regularly hosting performances of the Olympus Festival since 1991.

Excavation history

The theater was discovered in 1806 by the English explorer William M. Leake. In 1855, the French archaeologist Léon Heuzey confirmed the find. The first test excavations were carried out in 1970 under the direction of G. Bakalakis. The regular excavation work began in 1973 under the supervision of Dimitrios Pandermalis. After two years of rest, the work was resumed in 1977 by architect and archaeologist G. Karadedos. As the building has received no further attention since the Roman period, its basic structure remained unchanged. The excavations were carried out very carefully. This gave valuable information that allowed conclusions to be drawn about the original condition of the complex. The orchestra, the stage, the drainage, parts of the building and the main part of the koilon were uncovered.

Roman theater

The Roman theater was built in the 2nd century AD. It had 24 rows of seats arranged in a semicircle, beneath them were built vaults. The orchestra had a diameter of about 21 m. The building consisted of field stones, bricks and mortar. The stage was decorated with marble elements. Among the exhibits excavated here was a statue of Hermes.

The city walls

Since Dion was one of the few ancient Greek cities lying on a plain, it was essential to build a wall to defend the city against attackers. In the east, the swamp area of the Vaphyras provided some protection, but otherwise, there was no natural hill and therefore no acropolis. Around 400 BC Dion had approximately a square outline.

The city wall was built between 305 and 298 BC, under the rule of King Cassander, mostly from the limestone of the Olympus. It was 2625 meters long, 2.60 to 3.28 m thick and seven to ten meters high. The western side has a length of 642 m, the southern and northern section each of 682 m. The eastern part of the fortification has not been fully excavated yet. At a distance of 33 m (100 doric feet á 32.8 cm) were towers with a floor area of seven times seven m. In order to be able to defend the city more effectively, they were built at the outer line of the bulwark. In the southern and northern part of the wall were two city gates, in the western part one gate was found.¹⁵

At the Vaphyras River, in the east of the city, was probably a port facility. After the attack of the Aitolians, who partially destroyed the city walls, Philip V had the protection wall repaired immediately. Around 197 BC, at the time when the threat to Macedonia by the Romans was growing, Dion was the headquarter of Philip V.

During the Roman rule, the walls were paid little attention, and in some places, the walls fell apart. It was repaired when the raids on Dion happened more frequently in the 3rd century AD. In places, it is visible that stones and bricks have been placed on the base of the wall, which consists also today of massive blocks of stone. As a building material, also old sculptures and remnants of other buildings (Spolia) were used. Flooding in the early Christian period greatly reduced the size of the city. New walls were built on the north and east sides. Here, too, craftsmen used field stones and spolia like the remains of columns, sculptures and altars, as building materials. The new enclosure had only a length of 1595 m. In the 5th century AD, an earthquake probably destroyed the walls. It was not rebuilt afterward. The lack of protection may have been one of the reasons why the population gradually abandoned the city.¹⁶

The houses

As part of the excavations, private houses have been exposed in various areas of the city. Almost all have mosaic floors. The names of the former owners occasionally come from surviving parts of a mosaic or stamped lead pipes used for water supply. Furthermore, statues, columns, remains of furniture, busts and other finds were discovered. In summer 1992 parts of a water organ (Hydraulis) were excavated in the estate opposite the villa of Dionysus.

Villa of Dionysus

In 1982, archaeologists began exploring the area east of the main road. They brought to light the remains of an elongated building with shops and a bathing facility in the southwestern area. The bathroom could not only be accessed from the street but had a separate entrance from the neighboring house. The excavations brought to light statues of Dionysus, a Nike and parts of other sculptures and statuettes. In June 1987, a large mosaic was found in the spacious atrium, which later received the name Dionysus mosaic due to the depiction of the epiphany of Dionysus. Obviously, the atrium served as the dining room of the estate. Among other finds in this room were sculptures of four seated philosophers,

the statuette of a satyr and a statuette of Hercules. In 1989, four more rooms of the villa were uncovered. While the two first showed few interesting finds, in the third four clay storage jars were exposed. In the last room was a broken mosaic, which in its center represents the head of a Medusa. Furthermore, a statue of Hercules with a club, bow, arrows and lion skin, as well as the statue of a deer were brought to light. Two years before, the head of the deer and the hand of Hercules, which held the bow, were found in the atrium.¹⁷ The works in 1990 lead to parts of a statue that was a copy of Eros with a bow made by the Sculptor Lysippos.¹⁸

The thermal baths

Common to all thermal baths is the structure of the bathing area in pools with different temperatures including a cold water basin (frigidarium). Also, the type of heating, by a hypocaust system, is the same for all the mentioned baths.

The large thermae was built in the 2nd century AD. A hall covered with mosaic floor led to the bath cabins and the water basins. There were rooms where Asclepius was worshiped. Since the baths also served as a place for social life, an odeion for events such as readings, plays or musical performances, was integrated into the complex. It also included shops and toilets.

The thermal baths of the main street are located east of the main road opposite the monument with the armor and shields. The equipment was comparable to that of the large thermae, the area was only much smaller.

The thermal baths at the market can be found at the northeastern end of the Roman market. Mosaic floors and a reception hall adorned with paintings are the special features of this bath.

Outside the urban area, near the sanctuary of Zeus Olympios, are the ruins of another bath from Roman times.

The Odeion

History and construction

As already mentioned is the odeion a part of the large Roman bath. The external dimensions are 28.46 by 19.46 m, it offered 400 seats, which were arranged in the form of an amphitheater around the

semicircular orchestra. The excavations of the odeion began in September 1977 and lasted for two years. Archaeologists found the components of an antique theater with orchestra, koilon, four internal stairs, stage and two L-shaped staircases. Carefully executed masonry combined Roman architecture with local craftsmanship. An essential static element was the 1.55 m thick outer wall. She caught the lateral pressure of the koilon and supported the roof. The outer walls of the building were built of limestone or fired bricks. The excavations gave indications of what destroyed the odeion. Large cracks in the walls as well as the lowering of the floor and some walls indicate a strong earthquake followed by a fire. In 1990, once again excavations were carried out to measure the entire floor plan of the odeion for the planned restoration. Thereby shards from the Classical period came to light.¹⁹

Restoration

The natural stresses to which the remnants of the odeion were exposed, heat, frost and moisture, destroyed building materials such as mortar or wood over the centuries. The binding effect of the mortar subsided and the remaining foundation walls fell apart. The top part of the structure suffered the most, large blocks broke and fell down. The aim of the restoration was to reinforce and preserve the remains of the odeion. The old mortar was sealed and cracks in the masonry closed with fresh cement. The fallen stones were returned to their original place and fixed. The final work consisted of building a straight, the upper weight bearing area from surrounding stones and covering them with specially made bricks. Experts from the University of Thessaloniki examined the building materials and their ingredients. The material of the bricks corresponds to that of the antique bricks. The composition of the mortar matches his antique original. The construction was covered with lead before restoration. Thus, the old structure is strictly separated from the newly applied building materials. The floor of the odeion was covered with pebbles and the architectural elements found at the site, such as columns, were erected on their former stands.

The Roman market

It is an open space, once surrounded by shops and halls. On the side facing the mountains, in the middle of the building surrounding the market, there was a temple (Sebasteion), presumably dedicated to the Roman emperors. The floor is slightly above the level of the marketplace and is covered with mosaic. Inside were remnants of mural paintings and fragments of male statues. To the east of the

square, opposite the temple, stood a Roman basilica. Under the supervision of the local authority, the basilica has been used for banking and concluding commercial contracts.

The Praetorium

Near the villa of Dionysus, on the main road, are the remains of the praetorium. The building was used as a hostel for officials and emissaries as well as to accommodate ordinary travelers (in the taberna). A locally found Latin inscription called the property as praetorium with two Tabernae. The entrance was on the south side. In the eastern part of the complex, there were five bedrooms and a luxurious dining room, the Triclinium. The Tabernae consisted of two larger rooms in the western wing. Here the archaeologists found earthen storage vessels and some lamps. Between praetorium and the Tabernae was probably a barn. Public toilets were accessible to both the guests and the inhabitants of the town. A source served the hygiene, underground channels derived the wastewater.

The polygonal building

At the crossroads of the main street and the street leading to the west gate lie the remains of the polygonal building. It included about 1400 m² and probably served as a market hall. The complex is square and was built around a dodecagonal square. The area was surrounded by an arcade connecting the rooms of the building. The entrance was on the south side. A floor mosaic shows two struggling athletes and two slaves with rucksacks.

The water supply

The ancient Dion drew its water from the river Helikon five km away. From there, water pipes were laid to the city.

They were mostly underground, partly they were built as an aqueduct. Part of the aqueduct was discovered in a ravine northwest of the city. Within Dion, the water was collected in a central cistern from which it was distributed to other cisterns or wells. As a material for the water pipes, both clay and lead were used. This cistern was built in the 2nd century AD from stone and clay bricks. Two wells, which took over the supply of the households and the baths, lay in the northeast and southeast of the

urban area. A third was replaced by a smaller cistern after the destruction of the main cistern by an earthquake.²⁰

Despite the organized water supply separate wells also existed. So far, seven of them have been located and excavated. They are divided into three different types:

- Wells, which was walled with rough stones and later plastered
- Fountains made with wedge-shaped bricks
- Wells, whose shaft was lined with big clay pipes²¹

The necropolises

In the Hellenistic and Roman times, the cemeteries were outside the city walls. They extend in a westerly and northerly direction, their entire extension is unknown. While wealthy citizens and persons of public life have been buried in monumental tombs, simple people have been buried more modestly. The oldest example of a grave stele dates back to the 5th century BC and depicts a girl. After the Romans conquered Dion, coffins and grave steles were often inscribed in Greek and Latin.

The Christian cemetery is located south of the city wall. The distance between the tombs is smaller, they surround the cemetery church.

The Macedonian tombs

During the first excavations, a vaulted Macedonian tomb with Doric façade from the 4th century BC was found under a low burial mound. The marble doors were broken, the burial chamber had been robbed by grave robbers. The remains of a couch depicting a battle of cavalymen and parts of a frieze depicting lions were found.

In 1955 archaeologists found a second grave. It contained a stone kline, the floor was designed with colored pebbles.

One year later, a third grave followed. In addition to a stony kline archaeologists found three stone pedestals.

The fourth grave was discovered in 1979. Behind marble doors hid a couch with ivory inserts.

The last grave to date was uncovered in 1988. Among the finds was a silver tetradrachm with the image of Alexander the Great and a golden Charon's obol in which the name "Ephigenis" is imprinted.

As funerary objects, the deceased received gold jewelry, gold and silver coins, glass bottles, which possibly contained perfume, and glass jars. Some grave steles, as well as the grave goods, are exhibited in the Archaeological Museum.

The churches

The Basilica of the bishop

At its last heyday, when the church appointed Dion to a bishopric, the bishop's basilica was built in two stages of construction in the 4th and 5th centuries. It was a three-nave building with narthex. Remains of the walls are painted, the floor was covered with mosaic. A smaller building, west of the church, served as a baptistery (Babtisterium). An earthquake at the end of the 4th century destroyed the building. One used the existing foundations to build another church above it. The baptistery has now been integrated into the church, the baptismal font had the shape of a Maltese cross.

The cemetery church

In the middle of the cemetery, a three-nave church was built at the beginning of the 5th century. The nave had a mosaic floor. Narthex and aisles were covered with clay plates. Under the floor of the church, graves were found. In 1990, two with birds and plants friezes, decorated vaults were excavated.²² The building was later added a room in which the church treasury was kept. Also, a winepress and a granary were found there.

Study on environmental influences on the ancient building materials in the Archaeological Park Dion

In 2015, scientists from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki published a study on the condition of the stone building materials of Asclepion and the Demeter sanctuary. The aim of the study was to investigate the decay of the stone monuments and remains of buildings in the Archaeological Park of

Dion. Mainly it was to be researched, which environmental influences participate in which way in the decay process of the antique building materials. The materials mainly consist of limestone, sandstone, conglomerate and marble.

The environmental conditions:

- High humidity, frequent rainfall
- Great temperature fluctuations
- High occurrence of surface and groundwater
- Chemical, biological and mechanical weathering by the surrounding plants

Mostly the surfaces are covered with salt and a black crust containing calcium, magnesium, soda, potash and other substances.

The investigations were carried out using different microscopes and a spectrometer. From December 2010 to November 2011, monthly samples of precipitation were taken. These samples and water samples of the Vaphyras and other waters were analyzed by the researchers for their composition. The temperature fluctuations of the rocks were measured with infrared thermometers.

The researchers found various organic and inorganic substances that influence the weathering of the monuments. However, the main factor influencing the decomposition of the rock is the penetration of water. In combination with heat and cold, it reduces the cohesiveness of the surface structure and thus leads to the instability of the ancient building material.²³

The archaeological walk

Every year, the archaeological walk takes place within the program of the Olympus Festival. A professor of the Aristotle University, Thessaloniki is guiding through the Archaeological Park and informs about various topics that touch ancient Dion. The arc spans from Greek mythology, the kingdom of Macedonia, from the individual attractions of the park to everyday life in the days of Alexander the Great. Embedded in the program is the performance of a short play or the recitation of ancient texts.²⁴

Spathes, at the northern end of the Mycenaean culture

Most important

- Discovered by works on a firebreak
- Stolen artifacts were found in the Archaeological Museum, Dion.
- Testimony to the northern extent of the Mycenaean culture
- Coordinates: [40.146845°N](#), [22.237496°E](#)

The site is located near the village of Agios Dimitrios on a steep western slope of the Olympus massif at an altitude of about 1000 m and overlooks a mountain pass between Thessaly and Macedonia.

Excavation history

Among the first archaeological sites of Olympus was the excavation site Spathes (swords). It is a necropolis from the late Bronze Age. The oldest graves are from the 14th century BC. The last traces of use were found from the end of the 13th century, to the beginning of the 12th century BC. The settlement belonging to the necropolis has not yet been discovered. Many of the grave goods are made in the Mycenaean style, so that the Mycenaean culture probably extended (see also "History and Archaeology — an overview") across the border from Thessaly to Pieria¹ In 1975, the responsible archaeological authority was informed that when striking a firebreak several (at least 12 to 13) ancient tombs were destroyed. At that time a bronze sword was found, but it was lost. Indications revealed that commerce was conducted with grave goods. The trial excavation has begun in 1985 and continued in 1986 as a regular excavation. The archaeologists uncovered 34 graves, which were partially destroyed and looted. Parts of the stolen goods were later found in the storehouse of the Archaeological Museum, Dion. In 1985, some of the stone slabs that covered the tombs were stolen. Heavy snowfalls caused parts of the slope to slip. In 1987 and 1988, the slope was terraced and supported by a wooden structure. Later, the terraces were supported by massive masonry, some graves were stabilized with concrete. To protect against the weather, some of them have been provided with roof constructions.

Near the archaeological site of Spathes, another small cemetery was discovered in 1987, probably from the same period. Archaeologists recovered there six stone seals, further excavations did not take place.²

Necropolis

It was customary in this region of Greece at the end of the Bronze Age, that the deceased were buried in box-shaped graves. This type is known from southern Greece. The length of the graves is about 2.40 m, the width of 1.50 m and the depth between 1 and 2.50 m. The floor was covered with a 10 to 20 cm high clay layer, the side walls were carefully bordered with heavy stone slabs. Except for penetrating roots and natural deposits of building materials, many of the graves were intact. The number of burials found was 52. The graves had been repeatedly opened to new burials, including the burial of children.³

Excavations

In addition to weapons and jewelry, the deceased was given mainly pottery as burial objects. However, because of the way in which several people were buried inside a tomb, some of them went to pieces. The vessels are mainly made by hand, only a few are produced with a potter's wheel. The most important findings were made in a tomb in which were apparently buried leading personalities.⁴ In addition to rich grave goods, two skeletons were found, one male and one female. Remains of a spear, a bronze sword, painted and unpainted vases and perfume bottles, jewelry and stone seals (some with animal motifs) were recovered. The sword is slightly smaller but resembles the swords of Mycenae and Crete (Knossos, Iraklio). A bronze sword, from another grave, is of the same design as those discovered in Athens, Crete, Kos and other localities. Recently, a similar sword was found during excavations on the southeast side of Mount Olympus, west of Platamonas.

Leivithra, the world of Orpheus and the Muses

Most important

- Linking the history of the ancient city with Greek mythology
- Orpheus is said to have lived here and also been buried.
- Habitat of the Muses
- Staging area of the Roman troops before the devastating battle against the Macedonian army
- Not fully explored yet
- Coordinates: [40.027432°N](#), [22.538824°E](#)

Leivithra is located at the eastern foot of Mount Olympus. It is about four kilometers from the coast and two kilometers north of the village of Skotina. Leivithra is associated with both the acropolis, which reaches a height of 130 m, as well as the plain eastwards. It is bordered by the Griva and Kavourolaka rivers, which flow into the Ziliana river. Nearby archaeologists found graves from at least Mycenaean times with rich grave goods.¹ The archaeological site covers an area of 150 hectares, the fortified acropolis takes up 1.5 hectares.²

History

The name Leivithra was once the name for canals.³ The recent excavations confirm that the acropolis had been inhabited from the 8th to the 1st century BC. The upstream plain at least since the Bronze Age. Around 169 BC Roman troops set up their army camp between the ancient Heraklion (castle hill of Platamonas) and Leivithra.⁴ Coming from Thessaly, they began their campaign from here, which ended in the conquest of Macedonia.

In the 19th century, the Frenchman Léon Heuzey correctly determined the location of ancient Leivithra. 1914 he was confirmed by his compatriot André Plassart. Finds from the time of the last settlement date from the years around 100 BC. What ultimately caused the destruction of the settlement is still unclear. According to the latest findings, it should have been an earthquake, possibly in conjunction with a subsequent flooding

Excavations

So far, only randomly has been excavated on the acropolis, the vast majority is still untouched. Silver coins were found mainly of Macedonian origin, but also from other parts of Greece. Furthermore, smaller clay pots, large clay storage containers and fragments of metalwork, arrowheads and spearheads. A lead weight bears the inscription ΛΕΙΒΗ (LEIVI).

The acropolis was surrounded by a defensive wall. While the wall of the north side consists of field stones, big cuboids are stacked on the southwest side. On the west side, the foundations of a tower were uncovered. Forms of other buildings vary, they were built irregularly on narrow streets. The foundations have remarkable depth and suggest a multi-level construction. The upper walls were made of bricks, the roofs were covered with roof tiles in the laconic style. In the floor of the dwelling houses often clay storage pits (Pithoi) were embedded.

The previously excavated parts of the acropolis were covered for their protection. By a construction of metal baskets filled with stones, the hill was partially secured against further slipping.

In the neighborhood (Old Leptokarya and Skotina) graves from the Mycenaean and Iron Age were discovered. They contained weapons, tools and clay vessels as grave goods. The finds are stored in the Archaeological Museum, Dion.

The foundations of an ancient winery (Komboloi) were uncovered in the plain to the east. Built in the middle of the 4th century BC it was destroyed by a fire a short time later (beginning of the 3rd century BC).

Leivithra Park

Since the park next to the Olympus is also dedicated to Orpheus, the paths of the park are laid out in the form of his musical instrument, a lyre.

It is divided into three areas:

- An educational and recreational area
- Plants and myths
- Forest and environment

The route starts on the floor plan of a house that dates back to the Mycenaean period. It was discovered during construction works near Platamonas.

It is followed by an oval-shaped building, built in the prevailing style of the 8th century BC. The dimensions of the floor plan were modeled on a house excavated in Krania, at the foot of the castle of Platamonas. The foundations are made of stone, the basic structure of wood. The walls were made of a mixture of clay and straw, in the outer layer goat hair was worked in, the roof is covered with reeds.

The main building of the park is modeled after the Komboloi winery. Within the building, the evolution of the region from the Neolithic Age to the destruction of Leivithra is depicted.

On the west side, exhibition boards in four pavilions inform about the life and work of Orpheus and the Muses. In the immediate vicinity is an open-air theater, which was created in the form of an ancient amphitheater. Behind the theater, a staircase leads to the opposite archaeological site.

Along the paths, you can see plants that play a role in Greek mythology and whose meaning is explained on information boards. At the southwestern edge of the park is a small forest trail.

Exhibition

Display boards, photographs and maps inform the visitor about Leivithra, the nearby archaeological sites such as Komboloi or Tria Platania and the archaeological finds of the area. On display are replicas of tools and utensils of daily use. Modern tablets provide videos of the Leivithra Park and the acropolis. In a small cinema, archaeologists give insights into topics such as: "The construction of ancient Greek theater" or "The coinage in ancient Greece" on certain occasions.

Mythology

Orpheus

He was the son of the Muse Kalliope and the Thracian King Oïagros (other sources name the god Apollo as his father) and was born in a cave between Pimpleia (near today's Litochoro) and Leivithra. Following his musical predisposition, he developed into a singer. His lyre is said to have been given to him by the god Apollo. The legend tells that his music even made animals and trees dance.

Orpheus was one of the Argonauts. After returning from the search for the Golden Fleece, he fell in love with the nymph Eurydice. When she died of a snake bite, he went to the underworld and persuaded Hades to be allowed to lead Eurydice back to the living again. Hades agreed, on condition that Orpheus did not turn to Eurydice during his ascent from the underworld. Orpheus did not follow this condition and so Eurydice was doomed to return to Hades.⁵

In mourning, Orpheus withdrew and shied away from women. It was said that he has been killed by enraged women and later buried in Leivithra. According to the legend, the town would be destroyed by a boar as soon as his bones see the sun.⁶ A careless shepherd shoved the closing plate off Orpheus's grave and the sun shone on his bones. Then the river Sys (the ancient Greek name for wild boar, biological name: *Sus Scrofa*) swelled strongly and a flood destroyed the place.

The Muses

The Muses are daughters of Mnemosyne and Zeus. They lived near springs and were devoted to literature, science, and the fine arts. Hesiod wrote, that they enjoyed Zeus by their singing.⁷ They saw the past, the present and the future. The nine Muses and their tasks are:

- Calliope, poetry and science. She is the Prima inter pares and the mother of Orpheus. She is presented with the lyre and a book.
- Clio, her most important task is the preservation of history. Illustrated with papyrus scroll.
- Erato, from her comes the erotic poetry, she is the guardian of marriage. Also in her hands is a lyre.
- Euterpe, a musical Muse, but also a guardian of rhetoric. You can recognize her on a double flute.
- Melpomene, the Muse of tragedy. She wears a sword and a wreath of wine leaves.
- Polyhymnia, the sacred hymns and the search for knowledge is her aspiration. She is shown in deep meditation.
- Terpsichore, Muse of dance, song and lyre. She is depicted with the lyre and the cymbal.
- Thalia, the antipole to Melpomene - she is the Muse of the comedy and wears a mask and a wreath of ivy.
- Urania, the Muse of astronomy and astrology. Her hallmark is the heavenly sphere.

In Greek mythology, the individual Muses had no specific tasks, they were assigned to them later by the Romans.

The Muses gave us the words museum and music.

Cultural events

Leivithra is one of the venues of the Olympus Festival. Inside and outside the main building exhibitions of local artists and clubs take place.

Castle of Platamonas, contested checkpoint between land and sea

Most important

- Built above the ancient Heraklion
- First mentioned in pre-Christian times
- Expansion of the castle by Franconian crusaders
- Not fully explored yet
- Coordinates: [40.0060°N](#), [22.5983°E](#)

The castle is the landmark of the village Platamonas. It is located 5.6 km southeast of the ancient Leivithra on a rock right on the Aegean Sea.

History

Archaeologists found evidence that the first settlement of the castle hill already took place during the Bronze Age. The castle was built in the area of the ancient city of Heraklion, which probably stretched from the top of the hill to its feet. Scylax of Karyandar mentioned the place as “the first Macedonian city behind the Pinios River”.¹ The historian Titius Livius (also known as Livy) described the situation more precisely: “Lying on a rock between Dion and Tembi.” Along the hill ran the most used north-south connection of the country.

In the year 430 BC, the Athenians conquered the place to control the Thermaic Gulf from here to their possessions on the Chalkidiki. At the beginning of the 3rd century BC, the city and the now built port were destroyed. How, or by whom, is not known. Later, the region fell into the hands of the Romans. From the time of Christ's birth to the Middle Byzantine epoch of the 10th century AD, few traces have survived. The name Platamon for the area around the hill appears for the first time. Homer used the term to refer to a rock washed by the sea.² The first description of the town of Platamon dates back to the 12th century, and the castle itself is mentioned for the first time.

In 1204 Franconian knights, in the course of their conquest of Constantinople, founded the kingdom of Thessaloniki which included the fortress of Platamonas.³ They finally finished the bulwark but had to vacate it again in 1217 in order to give it to the Komnenos, a Byzantine noble family. The further history

of the place remains changeable. The Ottomans arrived at the end of the 14th century and were replaced by the Venetians in 1425. These lasted until the reign of the Ottomans in Greece began in 1453.

The last fighting took place during the Second World War. New Zealand troops took their quarters on the castle grounds.

During the construction of a railway tunnel through the castle hill, further foundations of buildings were discovered, which are assigned to the historic city of Heraklion.

The castle

A footpath leads from the parking lot up to the castle gate. The walled space includes the former city of Platamon and the actual castle. The extensive area is laid out as a polygon and had towers at irregular intervals. At the foot of the hill, to the left and right of the promontory that juts out into the sea, are two more towers. Within the castle complex, only the main tower in the western part, which is surrounded by its own wall, is preserved. In fighting, here was the last refuge of the inhabitants. A visit to the tower is not possible.

The gate, narrow for strategic reasons, was easy to defend. Preserved are the ground-plans of churches, houses, a forge, a pottery and other buildings, as well as cisterns and cannons from the late Middle Ages.

The defensive walls have a height of 7.50 to 9.50 m and have a thickness of 1.20 to 2 m. Over the centuries, they were raised; some of the different sections are still visible today. Except for the destroyed upper part of the bastion in the east, they are well-preserved and walkable in several places.⁴ Originally, the castle was surrounded by another, lower wall. It formed the first line of defense in case of an emergency.

Excavation history

During a trial excavation in 1989, archaeologists exposed the outer walls of a church in the northeastern part of the castle, near the protective ramparts. It was built in different stages of construction and was adorned with Byzantine sculptures from the 10th and 11th century. The walls have been painted twice, the latter painting dates from the 16th or 17th century.

During work in 1992, a house was located on the northern wall. In the same year began the investigations of the main tower. Near him was found a cistern. The excavations at the church brought new findings, under the foundations appeared a destruction layer, which points to an earlier use of the place.

In 1995 remains of other protective walls were discovered left and right of the castle gate. They consisted of rocks, which were fixed with clay. In the southeast of the fortress, the remains of another church were excavated. The walls were painted, the painting dates from the late 16th or early 17th century. In the southeastern part of the building, 160 cannonballs were stored.

In 1997, the foundations of a house connected to the defensive walls were uncovered in front of the castle gate. Several floor plans of buildings consisting of only one room were found. They were surrounded by a wall and had a stone-paved courtyard.

In the same year, rescue excavations began, the castle hill should be tunneled for the railway line Athens — Thessaloniki. There were made only less important finds. On the north side of the hill (Krania) was found a building from the 6th century and a small cemetery.

In 1998, 14 tombs were discovered, most of which had been carved into the rock of the castle hill.

Today's use

Today, the castle serves as one of the venues of the Olympus Festival. Under the open sky, with good acoustics, theatrical performances and concerts take place here.

Museums

Map of the Museums



This map was created with data from the Open Street Map Foundation.

Archaeological Museum, Dion

Most important

- Finds from Dion and the surrounding area are exhibited.
- The famous Hydraulis of Dion is on display.
- Attached to the museum are a laboratory, a workshop and a storehouse.
- In a separate building, the archaeotheke, the Dionysus mosaic is to see.
- Coordinates: [40.1705° N, 22.4872°E](#)

In order to adequately present the findings of the Dion archaeological site, the Archaeological Museum was built in 1983. It is located on the southern edge of the village, 500 m west of the Archaeological Park.

Exhibition

Due to the changing rulers and religions of the Classical, Hellenistic, Roman, as well as from the Byzantine period, in the museum artifacts from all these times are exhibited. In addition to the sanctuaries of the Greeks, the Romans established the Isis cult, which, like the other cults, was replaced by Christianity.

The building is spread over three floors. On the ground floor are mainly statues, statuettes, written evidence and ecclesiastical finds. On the upper floor, the finds from the houses of the city and from the surroundings of Dion are shown. The basement houses coins, tools and models of antique equipment. Behind the museum, on the south side, larger artifacts can be seen open air.

The tour through the museum should be started with a visit of the small cinema on the ground floor. In a short film, Professor Pandermalis informs about ancient Dion, the excavations and the museum.

Ground floor:

Main Thermae

Among the remnants of the Great thermae were several statues depicting Asclepius, the healer and protector of the body, and parts of his family. Besides his wife, Epione are statues of his sons Podaleirios and Machaon and his daughters Hygeia, Panakeia, Akeso and Iaso displayed.

The sanctuary of Demeter

It is the oldest excavated sanctuary in Dion dating from the 6th century BC. On the site cult objects, clay figures, lamps, vases and coins were found. The museum displays parts of sculptures from different eras. Such is a head of Demeter from the 4th century BC and the head of Aphrodite from the 1st century AD. A stone altar block served as a storage place for the meat offering during the sacrificial ceremony for the goddess Aphrodite. The Roman copy of a statue of Artemis (original from the 4th century BC) was found in the headwater of the river Vaphyras and is issued under the name "Artemis Vaphyria".

The sanctuary of Isis

The cult of Isis from Egypt, introduced by the Romans, began to supplant the cult of Artemis. There were statues of Isis Tyche, Isis Lochia, the goddess of birth, and Aphrodite Hypolympiada. The sculpture of Julia Phrougiane Alexandra, of which a copy can be seen in the Archaeological Park, was still upright on its pedestal when discovered. Furthermore, statuettes of Harpokrates, the companion of Isis, and stone tablets showing footprints of different sizes (possibly of men and women) are exhibited. In addition to the depictions of persons, the upper part of a well was found as well as cult objects such as a millstone, a fruit press and a small altar.

The sanctuary of Zeus Olympios

Here a marble head of the river god Vaphyras and stone tablets are shown. Among them are letters from King Philip V to his officials and the citizens of Dion, an agreement with the inhabitants of Lysimacheia in Thrace and a letter to the citizens of Pherse and Demetrias.

The tablets in detail:

- A letter from King Antigonus Gonatas to Agasikles. The 16 lines of the letter from the 3rd century BC deal with the settlement of a dispute between Noumenios and his children. It was about the ownership and use of a large property.
- A tablet of King Philip V to the Magistrate of Dion around 180 BC. The addressee, Eurylochos, was urged to recognize the status of the city of Cyzicus in Asia Minor as a religious place. A religious place at that time was not subject to secular rule.
- Parts of a tablet (around 200 BC) confirming an alliance between King Philip V and the inhabitants of Lysimacheia. The fragments contain the oath given by the envoys of the citizenship of Lysimacheia. Another document refers to one condition of the alliance, namely the prohibition on engaging into relations with a third party which is hostile to one of the two parties.
- A letter of King Philip V (206-205 BC) to the inhabitants of the Thessalian cities Pherrai and Demetrias. In it he defines the border between the two places on the basis of specific local conditions.
- Confirmation of a pact between King Perseus and the Boeotians (172 BC). From this connection, Perseus hoped support against the Romans. The Roman historian Titius Livius (Livy) noted that there are three stone steles on which this treaty was written down. One of them was in Thebes, the center of Boeotia. A second one stood in Delphi and another in a famous place whose name was not recorded. The discovery of the missing third stele in Dion testifies to the city's significance at that time.¹

The sanctuary of Zeus Hypsistos

Exhibited are the statues of Zeus and Hera sitting on their thrones as well as various stone statuettes of eagles.

Other exhibits

A find from the house Leda is a fully preserved marble table, which is supported by an artistically interpreted lion statue. Displayed in showcases are funerary objects from the ancient tombs. Shown are jewelry, glass and clay vessels, coins and other exhibits. A marble relief, part of a Roman sarcophagus,

represents two opposing sphinxes. From early Christian times stone reliefs, tombstones, crucifixes and objects of the liturgy can be seen.

Upper floor:

The areas upstairs are used for permanent exhibitions and for temporary exhibitions. Sometimes there are also concerts.

On display are artifacts from Dion and the surrounding area.

From the villa of Dionysus comes a mosaic representing the head of Medusa. The mosaic stones (tesserae) are made of colored marble, there are also some glass tesserae worked in. The production of such large works was commercially organized. There was a draftsman who planned the artwork according to the client's wishes and drew it on the prepared base. Workers broke and formed the required tesserae. Artisans then stuck them on the marked surface and sealed the joints.

The statuettes of four seated philosophers also come from the villa of Dionysus.

Hydraulis of Dion

The water organ of Dion, also called Hydraulis of Dion, is the oldest ever discovered Hydraulis musical instrument and is considered the oldest keyboard instrument in the world. The organ was produced in the 1st century BC.²

The instrument

With water organs, the ancestors of the organ-like instruments, constant air pressure is maintained by an air tank, which is located in a water tank. With the help of a keyboard, a valve is opened, whereby air flows into the organ pipe and generates a sound there. Each organ pipe generates a certain pitch.

The hydraulis of Dion is 120 cm high and 70 cm wide. 24 pipes with a diameter of 18 mm and 16 narrow pipes with a diameter of about 10 mm are arranged in two rows. They were decorated with silver rings. The body of the organ was decorated with silver stripes and multicolored, rectangular glass ornaments. The instrument is structurally classified between the water organ described by Heron of Alexandria and that of Vitruvius.³

Excavation history

At the beginning of the 1980s, the area east of the main road of ancient Dion was drained. The neighboring river had permanently flooded parts of the archaeological site. Here in the summer of 1992 planned excavations were conducted under the direction of Professor Dimitrios Pandermalis. The foundations of a building were uncovered opposite the villa of Dionysus. On the morning of the 19th of August 1992, archaeologists discovered pieces of small copper tubes. Furthermore, they found a larger, rectangular copper plate. The individual finds were partially connected by the compacted soil. After recognizing the significance of the find, the earth was widely removed and the find was sent, for further processing, to the workshops. After cleaning the items, the archaeologists realized that it was a musical instrument, a water organ.^{4,5}

Replica

With the support of the Greek Ministry of Culture and Sport and the help of Prof. Pandermalis, a reconstruction of the water organ was begun at the European Cultural Center of Delphi in 1995.⁶ It was built using ancient records and the original excavated in Dion. In 1999 the instrument was completed.

Exhibits from the surrounding area

Excavations of Pydna

Near Makrygialos, the skull of a girl was found during the excavations from 1994 to 1996, in the tomb 108. She had died young, she did not have a fully developed dentition. For her funeral, she was decorated with a bronze diadem. Besides that, she wore a bronze bracelet, three finger rings, a necklace and metal fittings on her belt. Archaeologists gave her the name "sleeping girl". Tiaras of this kind were very rare as gifts. They underline the rank of the deceased. Among the grave goods were three Mycenaean pottery vessels.

Tombstones and other finds from the necropolises of Pydna are on display.

Finds from Ritini

In a showcase bronze figures from the rural environment of Ritini are shown. In addition to animal figures, a Kuros and statuettes of Hercules are to see.

Temporary Exhibition

Currently (2019) an exhibition about the subject "Opening Roads" takes place. Artifacts found during the construction work of the national road are on display. The works started in 2008 and are finished by now.

Basement:

Coins

Many diverse coins, found in Dion during the excavations, are exhibited. Among them the gold stater, which was issued by Philip II and was at his time the most important currency in Europe. The silver quarter-drachma that Alexander the Great had minted was spread all over the east of his empire. An exhibition board shows on a timeline the minted coins in conjunction with the ruling kings of Macedonia.

The predominant coin-making material was silver. There were mainly heavy, valuable silver coins minted from which some were discovered in Mesopotamia, Egypt or the Levant. But also smaller coins, intended for the payment of the transactions of daily life, were in use.

In addition to commonly used coin for payment, one also found rarer coins. On these gods such as Zeus, Athena or Artemis are depicted.

The Macedonian coinage

In northern Greece, money was introduced quite early as a medium of exchange. Due to precious metal mines on the peninsula of Chalkidiki and in the Pangaion mountains, there were enough resources for coinage. In the first half of the 5th century BC, King Alexander I introduced coinage in the Macedonian kingdom. The main reason for this step was the obligation to pay taxes to the Persians. By expanding his empire to the east, Alexander I brought more mines in the vicinity of Philippi under his control.⁷

The yield from these mines alone was estimated at a silver talent (about 26 kg) per day. Depending on the availability of the raw material, coins were either made from pure silver or from a silver alloy with the addition of other metals. Later in the 5th century BC, two currencies existed parallel. Heavier and more valuable coins for foreign trade and lighter ones with lower value, for payments within Macedonia. Towards the end of the 5th century BC, the smaller pieces of silver were gradually replaced by bronze coins. Philip II expanded the Macedonian state and gained control of more mines. Next to the Mint in Pella, a second, probably in Amphipolis, was established.

A special coin category is the so-called ghost coins, also called Charon's obol. They are made of gold leaf and were put into the mouth of the deceased to pay for the ferryman Charon. He brought, according to Greek mythology, the deceased across the river Styx to the realm of Hades.⁸

The Roman coinage

After the emergence of the Roman Empire, Rome secured the sole right to mint gold coins. The aureus was the only gold coin in circulation. It was used for payments in foreign trade and for paying high officials of the Roman state. The Denarius became the international silver coin. The production of silver coins in Macedonia was discontinued, if necessary, bronze coins for local trade were still allowed to be produced. Also in Dion, there was a mint.

The Roman coins had a uniform appearance.

Tools and everyday items

Shown are building materials such as floor tiles, roof tiles, bricks, clay- and lead water pipes. Earthen household vessels containing oil or wine were produced using potter's wheels and fired in kilns. There are a variety of tools and chisels on display, of which one can directly see the effects of working on marble pieces. A small loom illustrates how fabrics were made. A mortar and its pestle are made of stone.

Mentioned should be a plow from the 3rd century AD, excavated south of the Hellenistic theater. A hand scale from the 1st century BC was very finely adjustable. From the same century comes a speculum, an instrument used for gynecological examinations.

A model of the hypocaust system shows how the thermae of the city were heated.

Outbuilding

The laboratory

South of the archaeotheke, the scientific laboratory is housed. It is operated by Aristotle University, Thessaloniki.

The workshops and storerooms

Southeast of the museum archaeological finds from Dion and its surroundings are stored in an elongated building. In a workshop, restorers deal with the cleaning, restoration and cataloging of the finds. Repairs to broken pottery are carried out on a table offering access from all directions. Using a microscope, the finest work is done, parts of finds are analyzed, coins are polished, etc.

The archaeotheke

This building, located west of the museum exhibits the Dionysus mosaic. From a gallery, it can be viewed from all sides. Also, findings from excavations at Dion and the surrounding area are presented to visitors in showcases. A video informs about the segmentation of the mosaic at its place of discovery, the transport to the archaeotheke and the subsequent restoration. The building was built especially for the exhibition of this mosaic.

Dionysus Mosaic

Description

The Dionysus mosaic is the largest existing mosaic ever found during excavations in Dion.⁹ It shows the epiphany of the triumphant Dionysus. In the center of the large-scale mosaic, Dionysus is depicted in a carriage. Next to him is a mature Silenus, who is more likely to be seen as the helper of the god than the charioteer. Two Panthers pull the wagon, two centaurs hold their reins. One of the two centaurs carries a jar (crater) that probably contains wine. The other centaur has a closed vessel on his shoulder, probably containing the sacred symbols of the Dionysus cult. The light background highlights the figure of Dionysus.

The artists (probably several people worked on the artwork at the same time) used tesserae of different sizes and several dozen shades of color to illustrate details plastically. They gave their work the character of a painting. Probably a picture from Hellenistic times served as inspiration.

The masks below and above the central mosaic are of high quality as well.

The middle of the three masks on the lower side shows Dionysus with long curls. The mask to his left represents a mature satyr with a snub nose.

To the right of him, the face of a barbarian is depicted. It is probably Lycurgus, king of Thrace, an enemy of Dionysus. He persecuted the god, who threw himself into the sea and was saved by the nymph Thetis.

The masks above the central mosaic depict a younger satyr on the left and an older silenos on the right. The mask in between shows the face of a woman with blue eyes and curly hair. This may be Thetis, the savior of Dionysus.

The artwork was created at the beginning of the 3rd century AD. The main part of the mosaic, the epiphany of Dionysus, measures 150 by 220 cm. The entire mosaic has a floor area of around 100 m².¹⁰

Excavation

In the summer of 1987, archaeologists found under a layer of soil the most significant mosaic of the extensive excavation site. It was almost completely preserved by the protection of the covering earth.¹¹

Of course, this valuable find should be preserved. Since it should be presented to the public, a footbridge was built on which visitors could walk around it and study the artwork from all sides. A roof construction was erected. For more than 20 years, the mosaic was protected from people, rain and sun under the roof construction. Although it helped against the sun's rays, it was powerless against groundwater and general decay. From year to year, the condition got worse. Some pieces of mosaic broke away from the ground, plants grew in the cracks. It was only a matter of time before this work, largely intact over two millennia, would be destroyed.

Restoration

It was decided to create a separate building for this artwork. After its completion, the mosaic had to be removed from the villa of Dionysus. In autumn 2015, conservators, archaeologists and workers started this project. In order to divide the mosaic into several parts, the position and shape of the individual mosaic stones were first marked on the intended dividing lines. Then these tesserae were removed. Special glue and textile sheets were applied to fix the remaining stones in their place. This was followed

by the division of the mosaic into several transportable plates. After that, these plates had to be separated from the subfloor. Beginning at the edge, holes were drilled in the ground beneath the object using long drills. With flat steel blades, which were inserted in the holes at intervals, experts detached the mosaic from the underground. Then it was gently raised to drive a matching steel plate underneath. The surface was covered with wooden plates by the helpers. Several belt tensioners helped to fix the two plates against each other so that no movement was possible during transport. The pieces, weighing up to 500 kg, reached the trailer via a ramp and were transported to the archaeotheke.

In the meantime, a precise image of the entire mosaic had been spread out there on the floor. It has been manufactured on a scale of 1:1 to show the restorers the space for each individual item. In order to stabilize the mosaic stones, the restorers removed the antique backing layer under the mosaic and replaced it with fresh mortar. Last but not least, steam dissolved the special glue between the mosaic stones and the fabric. The resulting segments were placed in their place and reunited to form the whole artwork again.

Alexandrion, Litochoro

Most important

- Dedicated to Alexander III (the Great)
- Funded by Greek Macedonians from all over the world
- Homage to their homeland
- Coordinates: [40.139240°N, 22.541842°E](#)

The Alexandrion is located just north of the Athens — Thessaloniki highway, near the Litochoro exit.

The building of the international “Alexander the Great Institute”, is a private institution of Greek Macedonians living abroad of their country.¹ They had the idea to erect a monument near the Zeus sanctuary of Dion, which was not only a symbol of the bond with their homeland but also a meeting place. It was founded in 1992, with funding from the Greek state and Macedonians from around the world.

The head office of the institute is in New York (USA), the local directorate is located in Katerini.

Purpose

The objectives of the institute are of charitable, spiritual, social, artistic and cultural kind. The preservation and spread of the Greek language and Greek traditions are of particular value. Exhibitions and seminars are organized, furthermore, the Alexandrion serves representative purposes.² Besides to the former President Papoulias, other high-ranking domestic and foreign personalities were guests. There are concerts, lectures and guided tours.

Exhibition

All the pictures, displays and exhibits showed in the U-shaped building are related to Alexander the Great. Starting with his birthplace Pella, all stations of his short life are illuminated. The largest exhibition board shows the route of his campaign from Macedonia to India.

Greek and English commented panels of Vergina, Pella and Dion explain Alexander's acting on these places. Worthy of note is a map of all the ancient sites of Macedonia and a copy of the mosaic of the Battle of Alexander against the Persians (Alexander mosaic) from Pompeii.

Olympus National Park Information Center, Litochoro

Most important

- Definitely recommended for visitors to the National Park!
- The modern exhibition informs its visitors about the mountain.
- Coordinates: [40.110036°N, 22.499°E](#)

It is located about one kilometer out of the village of Litochoro on the road towards the summits, opposite the extensive sports complex, and is signposted. Anyone interested in the National Park should check out here before visiting the mountains. Subjects of the exhibition are ancient sites, animals, geology, history, monasteries, mythology and plants.

Purpose

In 1938 Mount Olympus was established as the first national park in Greece. Due to its uniqueness, UNESCO declared the mountains a biosphere reserve in 1981¹. The building houses the offices of the National Park Administration, the exhibition, a library, various meeting rooms and a spacious atrium for events. There are also rooms for a café and a souvenir shop. The facility establishes the link between the National Park Administration and the public. The visitor is given an overall picture of the mountains.

Exhibition

At the beginning of the tour, visitors should watch an informative film about Mount Olympus. The exhibition was designed by the Goulandris Museum of Natural History, Athens.² She is divided into seven areas, which illustrate the characteristics of the different zones of the mountain. Distributed over several half-floors, there are large-format display boards which inform about relevant topics in Greek and English. With each increase in the exhibition, the next altitude of the mountain is shown and the prevailing flora and fauna are presented. Sights beyond nature are treated on separate boards. This

refers to archaeological sites such as Dion or Leivithra. The hiker is made aware of interesting places near the footpaths, such as the monastery of St. Dionysius or the cave of the painter Ithakisios.

The areas in detail:

- Entrance area of the exhibition with the cinema
- The Olympus, from its lowlands to the summits - an overview
- The range of 300 m to 500 m
- Middle zone of the mountains from 500 m to 1400 m
- Boreal forest zone from 1400 m to 2500 m
- Alpine zone from 2500 m to 2918 m
- History of the region

Service

The exhibition itself needs no further explanation. Nevertheless, multilingual guides will assist visitors. A certified Ecoguide is responsible for mountain tours. At the blackboard one will find a detailed weather report in Greek and English.

The books in the library mainly deal with the themes of Olympus, animals and plants. Most are written in Greek, but books in English, German and French are also on the shelves.

The so-called amphitheater, a room with 142 seats, can be used for congresses, lectures, meetings, etc. On request, a seminar room can be provided, registration is required.

The Olympic National Park Information Center is one of the venues of the Olympus Festival.

Mountain rescue

The theme does not directly touch the Olympus National Park Information Center but should be mentioned here.

The main players in the mountain rescue are the Litochoro Fire Department and the Hellenic Rescue Team (HRT). In extreme cases, the 2nd EMAK from Thessaloniki is asked for help. Around 20 firefighters are trained for rescue missions in the mountains. The HRT maintains the mountain hut Petrostrunga at about 1940 m altitude. Bigger operations are coordinated by the fire department. Usually, the organization who is able to reach the scene of the accident the fastest is going out to help.

Emergency numbers:

- 112 — General emergency number
- 199 — Emergency call of the fire brigade
- 2310-310649 — emergency number of the headquarters of the Hellenic Rescue Team in Thessaloniki
- The radio frequency 146500, which is intercepted regularly by the fire department (24/365) and by the HRT (at least in spring, summer and autumn).

Nautical Museum, Litochoro

Most important

- Nautical Museum in a mountain village, five km from the sea
- Worth seeing ship models
- Temporary exhibitions in the summer
- Coordinates: [40.105684°N, 22.503929°E](#)

The museum is located in the building of the municipal administration, Agiou Nikolaou 15, Litochoro, on the first floor.

History

The settlement of sailors in today's Litochoro began in 380 AD by the Byzantine emperor Theodosius. He sent people from Greek islands to Mount Olympus to settle there. Unfortunately, the exact origin of most people is unknown, only the island of Limnos is considered sure of the origin. Since most of the islanders were sailors, it was natural that they would practice their profession in the new home.

Until a few years ago, Litochoro did not have its own port, curiously, however, harbor police and a customs station. Most owners of the ships later lived in Thessaloniki, in the area around the church Agia Triada. This part of Thessaloniki is still considered the residence of sailors from Litochoro.

Since there was no road connection to Thessaloniki until about 1930, a ferry from Gritsa, here is the small fishing port of the village located, to Thessaloniki has been established.

The sailing ships of Litochoro sailed throughout the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea. Gibraltar was considered their natural limit. In their heyday, the inhabitants had 140 to 150 ships. Twice a year, these ships gathered in the roadstead off the remote beach of the mountain village. In the evening, lights were lit on the ships and the locals proudly called this magnificent sight "their fleet". The reasons for these meetings were the consecration of the water on January 6 and the celebration of the anniversary of the Prophet Elijah on July 20.

The liturgy for the consecration of the water was not held as usual on the sea but on the river Enipeas. The procession from the church to the Enipeas was led by the pastors, followed by the inhabitants of the village. All families with ships or members working as sailors carried long poles bearing the family crest. The ends of these rods were adorned by a cross. This was decorated as artistically as possible and thus a symbol of the wealth of the family. Then, in a basin of the river, a cross was thrown to bless the water and to make God watch over the sailors.

The festivities lasted until the 9th or 10th of January and also helped the shipowners to hire seamen. The offspring began the service at sea at the age of 15 to 16 years.

So it happened that about 65% of the population lived from seafaring.

The prosperity of the village and the openness of the inhabitants led to the founding of a school and a high school, which were supported by some shipowning families. Until 1929 children were taught here for free. It is noteworthy that this offer was not limited to the children of Litochoro, but that the facilities also taught pupils from other villages for free. In the golden years, 300 students took advantage of this valuable offer.

The big change came when the sailing ships increasingly had to give way to the steamboats. Most of the shipowners shied away from the high investments and so the old seafaring tradition almost died out in this mountain village. There are only two owners left. One of them lives in Thessaloniki and owns three larger ships, the other lives in the village and owns a smaller ship.

Most of the sailors are pensioners today, only 40 to 50 people actively work at sea.

So the seafaring had a long tradition, which is represented in the Nautical Museum. Between 1995 and 2002, (former) seafaring families of the village were asked for the donation of maritime relics. From 2002 to 2004, mercantile marine and navy exhibits were collected.

The association "Nautical Museum of Litochoro", founded in 2004, is registered in the Greek Ministry of Culture as an "institution of cultural maritime heritage". Since its inception, the scope of the exhibits has been constantly expanded.

Exhibition

Anchors, buoys, propellers and a torpedo are displayed in front of the building. Although the museum is dedicated to the commercial shipping, the tour of the exhibition begins with a model of a torpedo boat that sank a Turkish warship in 1912 in front of the port of Thessaloniki. Pictures, some of them now 100 years old, show proud families in the shipyard watching the construction of their ship. In other photographs, one can see sailors on board or in the harbor. In several showcases are impressive ship models. Some of them are replicas of ships once owned by Litochorians. Others represent a cross-section of traditional Greek ship types over the centuries.

Displayed are nautical devices such as compasses, chronometers and sextants. Although displaced by modern technology such as GPS, these are still mandatory on board. If they are missing or do not work properly, penalties are imminent. Furthermore, nautical charts and logarithmic charts are needed to determine the exact position of the ship.

The showpiece of the museum is the complete replica of a conning bridge.

Dedicated to the seafarers, who have not returned from the sea, a commemorative plaque is shown in the museum. It is striking that sometimes whole families fell victim to Poseidon's whims.

Olympus Geological History Museum, Leptokarya

Most important

- Personal guiding
- Clear representation of the geological structure of the mountain
- Exhibition of all kinds of stones occurring on Mount Olympus
- Fossils
- Coordinates. [40.057465°N, 22.559982°E](#)

The museum, located in the Georgaki Olympiou 32 street in Leptokarya, presents in several rooms rocks, minerals and fossils of Mount Olympus and the wider area. It was established with the help of the Department of Geology of Aristotle University, Thessaloniki.¹

Exhibition

One goal is to show the visitor the connection between geology and the Greek history.

Information boards explain the geological development of Greece. On the basis of a model, the distribution of the different types of rocks of the Olympus and their emergence epoch is shown. The occurring rocks are exhibited in showcases.

Due to the shifting of the continental plates, the peaks of the mountains are still pushed up by one to four millimeters per year. So it happens, that in an altitude of about 1000 to 1500 m fossilized marine shells can be found. A hitherto unique find was an ammonite, which was found at about 1100 m altitude. Other evidence that parts of the mountain used to be below sea level is limestone, which was drilled by mussels (Lithophagae) or limestone, which includes seaworms.

Olympus is a so-called tectonic window.² This means that erosion and faulting have exposed old rock layers that are normally hidden. This fact ensures that geologists from all over the world arrive for research purposes.

More panels explain that the mountain landscape got its present appearance only after the Wurm ice age. As the ice retreated, masses of boulders were moved along. This process shaped the landscape and influenced the shape of some stones. They are round at the top and flat at the bottom.

A showcase is dedicated to the subject of petrification. Exhibited are petrified plants and animals.

So far, only a few, smaller, caves have been discovered. Some of them are filled with ice, which does not melt even in summer.

Further Museums

Archaeological Museum, Makrygialos

The ground floor of the building houses the offices of the archaeologists, the laboratory and the workshops. The museum is located upstairs. At the moment one can only see a few of the many finds from Pydna, the necropolises of Pydna, Methone, Makrygialos and surroundings. Some smaller, mostly clay objects and amphorae, some of which were used as urns or sarcophagi for toddlers, are exhibited. The museum is not yet open to the public, it may be possible to visit the museum by appointment.

Museum of Enosi Pontion Pierias, Katerini

The museum is said to preserve the culture of the Pontic Greeks from the Black Sea region. On display are furniture, tools, costumes and embroidery. The replica of a typical residential room shows how people lived before their expulsion.

Museum of the Monastery of Agia Triada, Sparmos

Museum exhibits include 17th-century icons, precious vestments, old woodcarvings and books written and bound by monks from the monastery.

Museum of the Monastery of Agios Dionysios, Litochoro

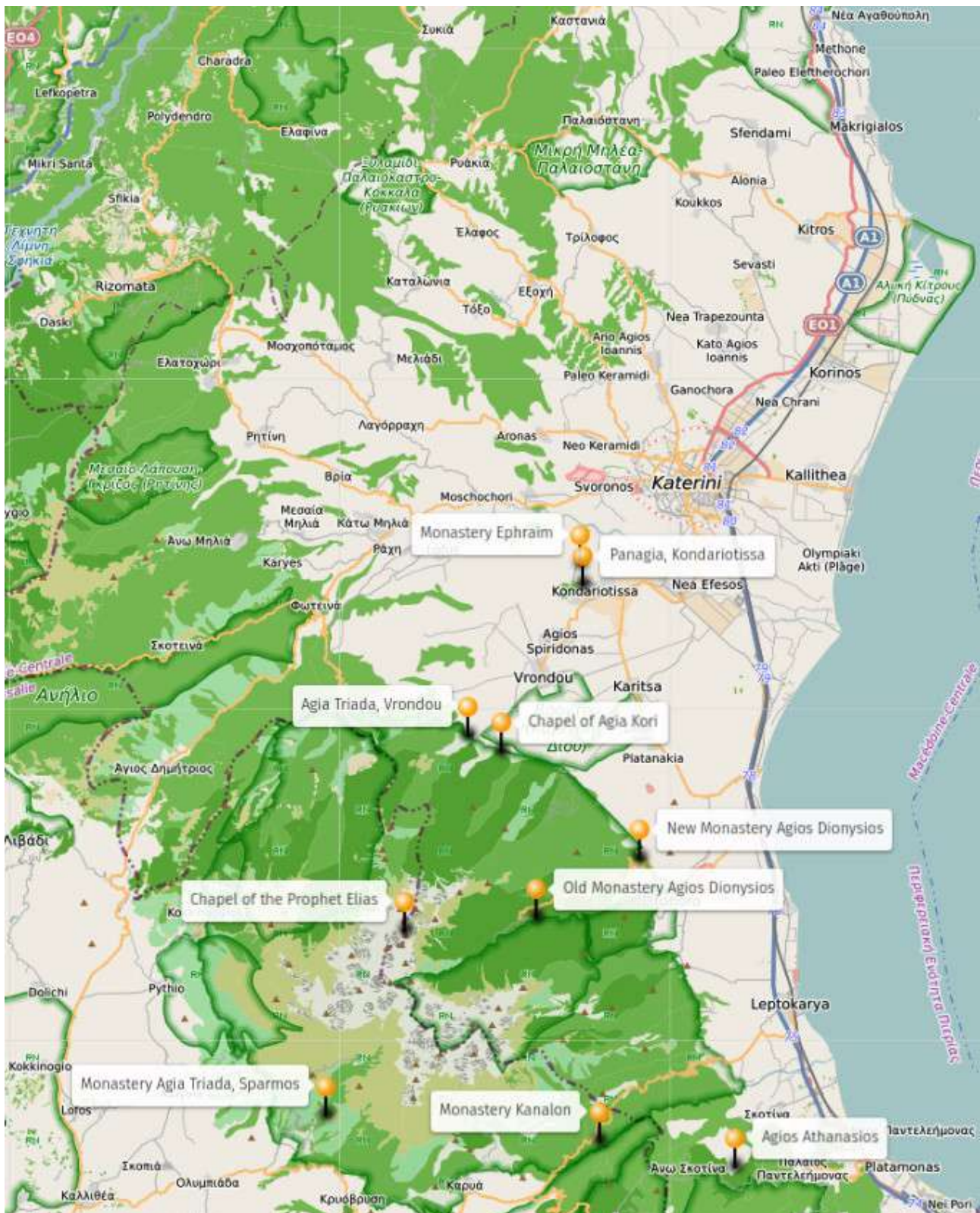
Historical writings, e.g. the document, which allowed the construction of the monastery by the Ottoman authority. Photographs of a soldier of the German Wehrmacht show the old monastery shortly before its destruction. Exhibited are relics, vestments, an epitaph woven with silver threads, documents, books, icons and inlaid pieces of furniture. Above the museum is the not publicly accessible library.

Museum of the Syllogos Mikrasiaton Pierias, Katerini

The exhibition deals with the topic of Asia Minor. The association exhibits pictures, photographs, costumes, uniforms, traditional clothing and everyday necessities in its museum.

Monasteries and Churches

Map of the Monasteries and Churches



This map was created with data from the Open Street Map Foundation.

Monastery Ephraim, Kondariotissa

Most important

- Convent
- A lovingly designed modern monastery
- Several churches
- Coordinates: [40.238333°N, 22.451389°E](#)

The monastery Ephraim, named after Ephraim the Syrian, was founded in 1983 and is inhabited by nuns. It is one of the youngest monasteries in the Olympus region.

The monastery is located on a 151 m high hill, 1.5 km north of the village Kondariotissa and 6 km southwest of the city Katerini.¹

The monastery

It is subordinate to the Diocese of Kitros-Katerini, belonging to the Archdiocese of Athens.²

The complex covers about 21 hectares and is surrounded by a wall. Outside the actual monastery, there is a church where weddings and baptisms take place, an ornamental garden and an olive grove. The center of the monastery is a square planted with a plane tree. To the west are a garden, the church Agia Irini and the administrative building. The buildings on the south side serve to entertain the guests, there is also one of the two exhibitions housing artisanal products of the nuns. The Sisters' home to the North is the largest building in the monastery. To the east of the main church, there is another ornamental garden and a second room where nuns offer their products. North of the garden is an aviary where peacocks, pigeons and chickens are kept.

The monastery life

In addition to the general liturgies, individual studies and prayers shape everyday life in the monastery.³

According to their abilities, the nuns are doing also other works:

Artistic activities:

- Byzantine icon painting
- Making mosaics
- Production of candlesticks and decorative candles
- Crafting pottery, jewelry and simple decorative items

Further activities:

- Horticulture, including fruit and olive growing
- Floriculture
- Poultry farming
- Production of traditional products, such as pasta and sweets

Some of the goods are offered for sale to the visitors of the monastery.

Monastery Agios Dionysios, Litochoro

Most important

- Inhabited by monks
- Valuable exhibits in the museum
- Chapel of Saint Dionysios in the Enipeas gorge
- Coordinates: [40.118°N](#), [22.484°E](#)

There are two monasteries of the same name.

The older of the two is located at the Enipeas Gorge at an altitude of 850 m. The newer monastery is located about two kilometers outside of Litochoro.

The name was originally Agia Triada, Holy Trinity.¹ Over time, however, the name of its founder, St. Dionysios, has prevailed. The new monastery was named after him.²

History

The old monastery was founded in 1542 and dedicated to the Holy Trinity. Surrounded by strong walls and dominated by a watchtower, it resembles a small fortress. During various conflicts, it served as a haven for civilians, but also for fighting troops. Today, the visitor sees a ruin from the outside. In its history, the monastery was destroyed and rebuilt several times. In 1821 Veli Pasha burned it down. The last destructive blow it had received by the German Wehrmacht in April 1943. Since Greek freedom fighters are said to have withdrawn in the monastery area, it was first bombed and later blown up.

The monks left the destroyed monastery and moved to the Metochi, the manor near Litochoro. The Metochi was founded in 1650 and consisted, except the lands, of only one church, the farm buildings and another building. In this lived the monks who cared for the operation of the farm. The estate was gradually expanded to a monastery after the Second World War. The older part of the new monastery is equipped with a heavy iron door and so separated from the rest of the system. Access to this area, the Abaton, is only allowed for men. Here are the old church, the cells of the monks, the refectory and the administration building. Just outside are the stables, workshops and cheese factory. All other buildings, outside the Abaton, such as the new church or the museum, were built after 1985.

The church

It was built in the classical orthodox style. An image of Saint Dionysios adorns the entrance. Inside, in addition to the usual sumptuous facilities of an Orthodox church, there are some special features. It is striking that many chairs, desks and other objects are decorated with inlays. These inlays are made of ivory or mother-of-pearl tiles. Former grenade casings are used as flower vases. An artist has worked out of the metal in relief technique ecclesiastical motives. On a small table stands an icon, with a picture of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, next to it a basket with pieces of paper and pens. Believers who want to appeal to the saint can put it on paper here.

The museum

It is located in the west of the complex. In troubled times, of which the old monastery experienced a few, brave monks hid the monastic treasure in secret vaults. A selection of salvaged exhibits:

- Three silver skulls with sacred bones inwrought into it are displayed along with other relics.
- Documents, including the document from the year 949 of the Islamic calendar (1542 AD), in which the Turkish occupiers allow the repair (actually rather the founding) of a monastery on Mount Olympus
- Through a magnifying glass one can admire the finest wood carvings within a metal cross.
- An epitaph embroidered with gold threads, made in the years 1578/79 by Arsenius, a monk of the Meteora monasteries
- Some of the rescued icons
- Inlaid standing desks and much more

Quite inconspicuous but significant, some framed black-and-white photographs hang near the entrance. They show the old monastery a moment before its destruction. A soldier from the Wehrmacht photographed secretly at that time and sent the pictures to the monastery a few years ago.

The chapel of Agios Dionysios

A twenty-minute walk distant from the old monastery is the Chapel of St. Dionysios. It is located on the Enipeas River, the path is marked. Who climbs from Litochoro to Prionia, inevitably comes past her. It is under an overhanging rock, built directly over a spring. It consists of a small prayer room in which the saint celebrated the sacred liturgy during his time as a hermit. A low shed served him as a place to sleep.

Monastery Agia Triada, Sparmos

Most important

- Fortress-like construction
- Inhabited by monks
- Founded already in Byzantine times
- Interesting museum
- Coordinates: [40.014056°N, 22.316394°E](#)

The monastery is located in the west of Mount Olympus at 990 m altitude and is dedicated to the Holy Trinity. It is located at a junction of the Karya-Elassona road.

History

The exact date of foundation is unknown. Records show that the monastery was inhabited since at least 1386.

The heyday began in the early 17th century, with its peak in the second half of the 18th century. The church was renovated in 1633. From this time come the oldest, very well-preserved icons. The cells of the monks were completed around 1739. At that time, the monastery obtained its possessions, became largely self-sufficient and had the financial means to engage in external affairs.

The most difficult years were those of Ottoman rule.

The monastery was one of the liturgical schools of Orthodox Christianity. Educated monks not only ensured that the Greek language remained alive but also taught the people. They set up a library and a study room, the bookbinding was practiced by experienced brothers from the 17th to the 19th century. Many of the manuscripts and books of that time were saved and are located in the monastery of Panagia Olympiotissa, in Elassona. Some copies are exhibited in the museum.

During the Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman rule, the monastery supported the local fighters. Due to its location, far away from the Ottoman administration in Elassona, the monks were able to act relatively freely. They hid soldiers and ammunition, provided clothes and provisions.

From the middle of the 19th century began the slow decline and in the second decade of the 20th century, the last monks left the monastery. It was closed for about 80 years. After the inauguration of the Metropolitan of Ellassona, Basileios, began the reconstruction of the facility. In 2000, the first monks moved back into the monastery.

The monastery

A tower dominates over the high outer walls. They are only interrupted above, from the second floor on, by small barred windows. At the northern part, four mighty retaining walls reinforce the statics of the outer wall, which is about one meter thick. The wooden front door is covered with iron and looks very stable. The layout of the monastery corresponds to a pentagon. The church is the central building.

Towards the inside of the monastery, the rooms on the second floor are supported by columns. Architecturally, there are shady colonnades that form an ambulatory around the church.

From the colonnades, one reaches the entrances to the museum and the monks' shop, as well as to the areas of the monastery which are not accessible to the visitor.

A small, very old fountain on the south side donates holy water. In the southwest, one finds the semantron and the bell frame of the monastery. The beating of Semantron calls the monks to prayer.

The property includes four chapels, of which the one of Saint Haralambos is located on the grounds of the monastery. The Chapels of the All Saints, the Most Holy Theotokos (Virgin Mary) and John the Baptist, lie outside the monastery grounds.

The church

The structure is 23 meters long, seven meters wide and has outer walls that are one meter thick. It is a simple, straight structure, covered with natural stones, the roof is tiled. It consists of the narthex, the church room and the altar room separated from the iconostasis and accessible only to the priests.

Through small windows, some light illuminates the church. The paintings, the carvings, the icons, everything lies in the semi-darkness. All walls are adorned with mural paintings, biblical motifs or images of saints. The wooden ceiling has different patterns, painted in different colors. In some places, ceiling paintings were inserted. Several chandeliers with wax candles hang down from the ceiling.

They are decorated with porcelain balls and ostrich eggs. The floor is made of marble with beautiful inlays.

The door to the sanctuary was decorated with gilded wood carvings and icons. The carvings of the iconostasis are purely handmade.

The museum

On a few square meters, numerous exhibits are on display. Precious vestments, the most valuable icons of the monastery from 1633 and books that were bound here. Silver vessels used during the liturgy, embroidery and documents that bear witness to the history of the monastery are exhibited.

Monastery Kanalon

Most important

- Convent
- Founded already by Byzantine times, the oldest inhabited monastery in Olympus
- Notable location on the edge of a gorge
- Coordinates: [40.0033°N](#), [22.4621°E](#)

The monastery is located in the northeast of Thessaly, at the road connecting Leptokarya with Karya, above the Ziliana River. The name refers to four nearby torrents known as Kanalia (canals).

History

In 1055 the monks Damianos and Joakim chose this place to build a monastery and dedicate it to the Holy Mother of God. The French archaeologist Léon Heuzey dated the foundation to the 10th century.¹ It is located on an altitude of 820 meters and is surrounded by forest. Unfortunately, there are no records of the first centuries of existence. An inscription from 1638 is the oldest surviving reference that exists. The frescoes in the chapel of the come from this period. The facility then also consisted of the refectory and the church. In 1681 a chapel dedicated to Saint Dimitrios was added. The west wing, in which today the cells of the residents are, was built later.

The heyday of the monastery was in the 17th century. In the 19th century, it had to endure hard times. Thieves attacked and plundered it. In 1881 the church collapsed for unknown reasons. A first attempt by the architect Stamatis to rebuild it failed. The building collapsed again. Two years later, it was rebuilt on the old foundations according to the plans of the architect Efthymios Milios.² In 1930, the last monks left the monastery. It was abandoned and began to disintegrate. Only in 2001, it was again occupied by nuns.

Chapel of the Prophet Elias, Mount Olympus

Most important

- Highest Orthodox church worldwide
- Highest church of the Balkans
- Coordinates: [40.097966°N](#), [22.364606°E](#)

In the immediate vicinity of the highest peaks of Mount Olympus (Mytikas and Stefani) lies the 2803-meter-high peak of Profitis Ilias.¹ The nearest mountain huts are the Apostolidis Hut² (430 meters away) and the Christos Kakkalos Hut³ (around 600 meters away).

History

Saint Dionysios, the founder of the Monastery of the Holy Trinity in Litochoro (see Monastery Agios Dionysios), also founded the chapel of the Prophet Elias in the 16th century.⁴ It was built on the ruins of an ancient structure. Dionysios, who lived an ascetic life, is said to have dwelled in the church for a time. The chapel is the highest church building in the Balkans and the Orthodox Church worldwide.⁵

The chapel

The chapel was built on top of Mount Profitis Ilias; The building materials were mainly the surrounding stones. The floor of the chapel is covered with stone slabs, the outer walls are made of layered stones, without further connecting material. The stone-tiled roof is supported by a solid wooden construction to support the snow load. An atrium is protected on the eastern and southern sides by a stone wall, which has an entrance on the north side. The low entrance to the chapel is on the south side of the building.⁶

Inside hang some icons. A small altar offers believers the opportunity to light a candle.

Panagia, Kondariotissa

Most important

- Oldest Byzantine building at Mount Olympus
- Interesting dome
- Coordinates: [40.229722°N, 22.453333°E](#)

Built on a small hill, within a walled area, the church is a very well-preserved Byzantine monument at Mount Olympus. One will find it in the northwest of the village of Kondariotissa, near the Ephraim Monastery, some 6.5 km southwest of Katerini.¹

The church

Judging from the shape (morphology) of the building, it was built at the time of the iconoclasm (picture dispute of the Orthodox Church) or slightly earlier.² Construction is dated to the 7th century (other sources refer to the beginning of construction between the 7th century and the 10th century). Structural changes took place in the 11th century, in the 15th century, the building was restored. Parts of the exterior wall show various styles of masonry work. The construction of the church is said to be related to the desertion of ancient Dion. The last inhabitants abandoned the city roughly at the time the church was built.³

The building measures approximately. 10 m by 11.5 m. Four unadorned, round pillars support massive arches on their capital, which in turn carry a cylindrical dome. It is a small three-nave church with Narthex and Tribelon. It has in the north and south part each a chapel, the southern served as a baptistery, the northern as Hagiasma (the sacred spring). The apse, delimited by a carved wooden iconostasis, in the western part of the church, is bounded by a three-part window. The apse, dome and parts of the walls are decorated with mural paintings. Nothing remains of the original decorations, the visible frescos date from the 15th century, from the time after the restoration of the church. Some of the terracotta floor tiles are labeled with the name "Dion". The early parts of the structure resemble the basilica of Agia Sophia in Thessaloniki.⁴ The same architectural features were found in other Greek churches of the 8th and 9th centuries. Possibly the church was used as a monastery church.

Agia Triada, Vrontou

Most important

- Unique location on the edge of a gorge
- Coordinates: [40.165556°N](#), [22.392222°E](#)

The Church of Agia Triada, near Vrontou, is a very well-preserved post-Byzantine monument. It is located at about 400 m altitude on a rock over a gorge, 4.7 km southwest of the village Vrontou. The first mention of the church takes place in 1597/1598. In 1758, the building was expanded. An inscription above the front door shows the year 1758 and the name of the bishop Zosim[a] (Ζωσιμ[α]).

The church

It is a single-nave church. Originally it consisted only of a cross-shaped building. In 1758, the front building was erected. The masonry consists of coarse field stones, the roof is covered with stone slabs. On the southern part, a low door leads to a small balcony covered by an iron railing. The view alone is worth the visit of this church. The view sweeps from the distant Aegean Sea to the mountains, to the abyss directly in front of the balcony.

The elder part is mostly preserved in original condition. The walls and the dome are completely painted, mainly with biblical motifs, but also with geometric patterns. The missing upper plaster in some places releases underlying frescoes. The older painting dates from the 16th century. The overlying frescoes, probably painted by Macedonian artists, are dated around 1761. An inscription hidden under a mortar layer indicates the 23rd of August 1761 as the date of completion of the works. The wooden iconostasis is partly decorated with carvings, partly painted. The dome depicts Christ surrounded by his disciples.

The front building is more modern. The floor is covered with flagstones framed by terracotta tiles. On the eastern and western walls are benches; the walls are plastered, painted white and decorated with icons. The room is lit by oil lamps and candles if required.

Chapel of Agia Kori, Vrondou

Most important

- A legend from the time of Ottoman rule
- Highly frequented by believers
- Coordinates: [40.162772°N, 22.408725°E](#)

The chapel is located four kilometers southwest of the village of Vrondou in the vicinity of the church Agia Triada. The chapel can only be reached on foot via a staircase (about 170 steps) that leads down into a ravine.

The legend

The holy girl came from the Zagorochoria, the isolated villages in the area of Ioannina. The story began between 1790 and 1810, at the time of Ottoman rule under Ali Pasha. He fell in love with her and wanted to bring her to his harem. Since she was a Christian believer, and she would have had to convert to Muslim belief in the event of a wedding, she wanted not to be married to a Muslim. The bridegroom decided to have his bride forcibly fetched from their parents' home by soldiers. A soldier warned the girl, and she escaped to Mount Olympus in the village of Vrondou. She did not give her name to anyone, fearing that her captors might find her hiding place. She lived in the village for several months until the local commander became aware of her. He reported his discovery to Ioannina and Ali Pasha sent soldiers to fetch her.

She got aware of it and climbed into a ravine near the village. Their pursuers were said that she had fallen down in the ravine, and they returned to Ioannina. Fearing new discovery, she stayed in the gorge and lived there in a small cave. Occasionally she was given some bread and cheese by shepherds, otherwise, she had to be content with what nature offered her. So she lived there for some time until one day there was no sign of life from her. Later, loggers descended into the gorge and found there an intact skeleton hugging an icon. They remembered the girl who had been hiding here and figured it was her skeleton. When they excavated a grave to bury their remains, suddenly at this place arose a spring. On their grave, the lumberjacks erected a small chapel, which they adorned with the icon that

kept the girl hugging to the last. Instead of the present bridge, two tree trunks crossed the stream. As time went by, faith in miraculous healings of the girl became established in the population. Many miracles were attributed to her, the circle of believers who sought her help grew.

Today's significance

The water of the spring is considered sacred, it is said to have healing properties. The water is drunk as well as used for washes. Believers seeking healing for a sick girl when they make a pilgrimage to the chapel. They pray for the healing of the sufferers. They tie textiles or jewelry, worn by the girl, to the bushes near the chapel.

Agia Kori is not an official saint of the Greek Orthodox Church.

Miscellaneous

Olympus Festival

The Olympus Festival is a major cultural event in Greece. It is the largest event of its kind in Northern Greece and takes place annually in the months of July and August. The aim is to provide both the local population and tourists culturally high-quality entertainment and thus promote the tourism of the region and the contact between different cultures.

Organizer

The organizer is the Olympus Festival Organization (OR.FE.O), based in Katerini.¹ It is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting Greek and international culture and stimulating tourism in Northern Greece. It is represented by a nine-member board, which is re-elected every three years.

OR.FE.O cooperates with the state theaters in Athens and Thessaloniki.^{2,3} Furthermore, contacts are maintained with private theaters and artist organizations. Also, important is the development and maintenance of the network of foreign artists and cultural organizations abroad. The result is combinations, such as the performance of the Swan Lake Ballet at the 2016 Festival, in which professional dancers from Russia performed together with the students of local ballet schools.

Funding for the festival is mainly supported by donations and the sale of tickets.

History

The first Olympus festival took place in 1972. In the summer months, it is a magnet for locals and tourists. Since 2010, the Olympus Festival has been cooperating with a host country. The aim is to deepen the friendship between Greece and the host country and to present its cultural characteristics. Some events of the festival are therefore reserved for artists of this country. Increasingly, the cinema is also used as a medium to bring the audience closer to the culture of the host country.

The host countries

- 2010 France
- 2011 Spain
- 2012 Russia
- 2013 Norway
- 2014 Austria, Germany and Switzerland
- 2015 Morocco
- 2016 Romania
- 2017 Cyprus
- 2018 Czechia
- 2019 Israel

The program

The program includes:

- Performances of national and international artists such as Milva, Haris Alexiou, Demis Roussos, Nana Mouskouri, Goran Bregovic, Luz Casal and many others.
- Ballet
- Classical concerts
- Classical comedies and tragedies from the Hellenistic period.
- Theater
- Choirs
- Traditional Greek music
- Performances of modern music
- Free guided tours of the Archaeological Parks of Dion and Leivithra.
- Archaeological information events with specific topics or reference to new finds in the archaeological sites.

Investigations by the Katerinis University of Applied Sciences revealed that the audience's education is over average and that the regular catchment area reaches from Thessaloniki via Larissa to Kozani.

Performance venues and their historical significance

- Dion, Hellenistic theater. The Bacchae of Euripides was premiered here some 2,400 years ago.
- Leivithra, Leivithra Park. The singer and poet Orpheus is said to have lived here.
- Pydna, archaeological site. Here lost 168 BC The Macedonian King Perseus the decisive battle against the Roman invaders.
- Castle of Platamonas. A building from Byzantine times, built on the hill, which also is assumed to be the location of the ancient city of Herakleion.
- Byzantine Church of the Panagia, Kondariotissa. The church was built more than 1000 years ago on existing, much older, foundations.

Epilogue

The Olympus and its attractions are worth a visit.

Visitors will find in this region almost everything Greece has to offer.

Kilometers of sandy beaches as well as a cliff.

Hidden mountain villages, in which hardly a stranger strays or touristic developed places.

Simple taverns or fine restaurants.

The leisurely fishing port at Plaka or the lively marina at Platamonas.

Choose.

Enjoy!

Have a good trip

Further readings

- Dimitrios Pandermalis: Dion the Archaeological Site and the Museum, Athens, 1997, ISBN: 960-500-080-6
- Dimitrios Pandermalis (Editor): Gods and Mortals at Olympus. Hellenic Republic, Ministry of culture and sports, Onassis Foundation, USA, 2016, ISBN 978-0-9906142-2-7
- Efi Poulaki-Pantermali: Makedonikos Olympos. Mythos – Istoria – Archaeologia., Greek ministry of culture and sports, Thessaloniki, 2013, ISBN 978-960-386-110-2 (Greek)
- Efi Poulaki-Pantermali: Leivithra, Greek ministry of culture, Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, 2008, (Greek)
- Besios, Matheos: Pieridon Stefanos, Pydna, Methone and the ancient sites of northern Pieria, Katerini, 2010, ISBN 978-960-99308-0-2, (Greek)
- The archaeological work of Macedonia and Thrace (AEMΘ) is a documentation of the archaeological development in the areas mentioned. It is published annually since 1987, can be downloaded for free and can be found here: <https://www.aemth.gr/en/> (Languages: Greek, little English, rarely German or French)
- Letters from the Underground, Ministry of culture - Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki - 27th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities
- Holy Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of St. Dionysios of Olympus, Litochoro, 2014 (Greek)
- Iera Moni Agias Triadas Sparmou, 2006, ISBN 960-89151-0-4 (Greek)

Olympus Alpine Biblioteca

Founded in 2010, the online library contains works that treat the Olympus. The goal is to create as complete a collection as possible of all published books and texts and, if possible, to make them available for download. The list is chronological after the date of publication and dates back to 1776.

Over 300 books, eBooks and PDF are listed, some of which are no longer available, especially ancient copies. It is noteworthy that most titles published in the 19th century can be downloaded. Including classics like “Travels in Northern Greece (1835)” by William M. Leake or “Le Mont Olympe et l'Acarnanie (1860)” by Léon Heuzey.

Of the works published in the 20th and 21st centuries, almost half can be stored for private use. Currently, titles are recorded in Greek, English, German, French and Italian. The downloads are free.

The topics include:

- Archaeology
- Fauna
- Flora
- Geography
- Geology
- History
- Mountaineering
- Travelogues
- Sports

<https://oab.gr/home-en/>

About the author

Several years ago, I was interested in Leivithra, an ancient city on Mount Olympus, near the village Skotina. Since I found nowhere reliable information, neither about Leivithra nor about other ancient sites at Mount Olympus, I researched myself and wrote my own homepage for the publication of my findings. Little by little, the research drew wider circles and links emerged between different cultural institutions in the region. In addition to archaeology, I soon dealt with museums, monasteries and culturally significant organizations.

In December 2018 I decided to combine the individual texts into a book. So the reader sees not only a part, but the whole picture of the region.

Hope you enjoy reading

Jürgen Weidner

Email

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Glossary

I have tried to avoid technical terms. But at the latest, if you study the continuative literature or, hopefully, visit the places described, you will be confronted here and there with lesser-known terms. A small selection:

Abaton	inaccessible, for certain persons a not to be entered place
Acropolis	upper town. Located on a hill above the city.
Apse	Semicircular extension of a church that can serve a variety of purposes.
Basilica	early Christian church, today a title for special churches.
Cavea	auditorium in Roman theaters
Chthonic deities	In the subterranean underworld living gods.
Destruction layer	a layer of remnants resulting from a sudden destruction (fire, earthquake).
Dromos	way leading to the burial chamber (s).
Epiphany	appearance
Ex situ	not found at the original location.
Extra Muros	outside the city (wall)
Frigidarium	cooling pool in a Roman bath
Hetairoi	Macedonian aristocrat elite cavalrymen
Hypocaust heating	antique heating system in which floors and walls were flowed through by warm air.
Iconoclasm	image dispute within the Orthodox Church. Started about 730 and lasted for over 100 years.
Iconostasis	a wall in an Orthodox church decorated with icons
In situ	so found locally
Intra Muros	within the city (walls)
Katholikon	church in an orthodox monastery
Centaur	a being half human, half horse
Kline	couch made of wood or stone were the deceased frequently were buried on.
Koilon	auditorium in Greek theaters
Lithophagae	in limestone boring seashell. Literally: stone eater
Lysippos	famous Greek sculptor
Medusa	one of the Gorgons, instead of hair snakes have grown her

Metochi	a monastery hierarchically subordinated to another monastery. Often a farm or a representative office.
Narthex	vestibule of a basilica or a church
Odeion	roofed theater
Phalangites	soldiers of the phalanx
Phalanx	with long lances, short swords and shields armed troops.
Pithoi	pottery
Plutarch	Greek philosopher and writer
Praetorium	originally camp of the commander, here shelter for high officials
Refectory	dining room of a monastery
Satyr	henchman of Dionysus, often depicted as a human with animal limbs (horns, hooves).
Sebasteion	a temple dedicated to a Roman emperor
Silenos	similar to the satyr
Semantron	wooden board in Orthodox monasteries. It is struck with a hammer and calls the inhabitants to the liturgy.
Spolia	older materials, such as remains of columns, used to build new buildings.
Stauropegion	an Orthodox monastery that is not subject to any diocese but is directly subordinate to the Patriarch of Constantinople (Istanbul).
Tessera	mosaic stone, plural Tesserae
Thucydides	Athenian general and historian
Tribelon	three-parted entrance or access
Triclinium	antique dining room (usually equipped with three loungers)
Triglyphs	Doric order ornament element (three vertical notches).
Tumulus	mound grave

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