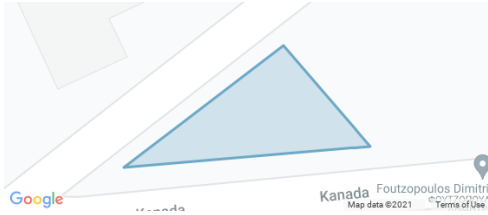


The Pharsalos Metroon

By Gino Canlas, University of British Columbia

Entry tags: Religious Complex, Shrine, Greek Religions, Religious Place, Mystery Religion, Greek Cult, Phrygia, Graeco-Roman, Aegean, Religious Group, Greece, Hellenistic Religions, Temple

The sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods in Thessaly



Date Range: 399 BCE - 100 BCE

Region: Pharsalos Metroon

Region tags: Greece, Aegean, Thessaly, Northern Greece, Central Greece

The location of the possible Metroon (Sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods/Kybele) in Pharsalos (mod. Farsala), in use from the 4th c. BCE to 2nd c. BCE.

Status of Participants:

✓ Elite ✓ Religious Specialists ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

General Variables

Sources and Excavations

Print Sources

Print sources used for understanding this subject:

— Source 1: Katakouta, Stella. 2014. "Πήλινα πλακίδια της Μητέρας των θεών-Κυβέλης από ιερό της Φαρσάλου." In A. Giannikouri (ed.), *Κοροπλαστική και μικροτεχνία στον αιγαιακό χώρο από τους γεωμετρικούς χρόνους έως και τη ρωμαϊκή περίοδο. Διεθνές συνέδριο στη μνήμη της Ήους Ζερβουδάκη, Ρόδος, 26-29 Νοεμβρίου 2009*. Athens: Ministry of Culture, pp. 435-448.

Reference: Stella Katakouta. *Οδός Καναδά (O.T. 442 Β, οικόπεδο Δ. Κυρίτση)*.

Reference: Gino Canlas. *Sacred Space and Community Identities: Sanctuaries in Broader Thessaly from the Archaic to the Early Imperial Periods*. PhD Dissertation. University of Alberta.

Reference: Maria Mili. *Religion and Society in Ancient Thessaly*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Online Sources

Online sources used for understanding this subject:

— Source 1 URL: <http://atlasthessalias.culture.gr/-----7.html>

— Source 1 Description: Pharsalos - Archaeological Atlas of Thessaly (in Greek)

Has this place been the focus of excavation (pre-modern, illicit, or scientific):

Answer 'Yes' for each period or type of excavation.

– Yes

↳ Type of excavation:

– Scientific

Notes: The site was first discovered during rescue excavations conducted on the property of Dimitrios Kyritsis on the pedestrian walkway intersecting Kanadas Street by the Larisa Ephorate (under the direction of Stella Katakouta) in 2002, uncovering the building discussed below, an ancient road, and various other buildings.

↳ Years of excavation:

– Year range: 2002

↳ Name of excavation

– Official or descriptive name: Οδός Καναδά (Ο.Τ. 442 Β, οικόπεδο Δ. Κυρίτση), Φάρσαλα

Topographical Context

Is the place associated with a feature in the landscape

– Other [specify]: No, it is within an urban context.

Does the place involve human-made features besides structure:

Other features might be ground clearing, terracing, other modifications of the local environment.

– I don't know

Notes: The foundations of the building were significantly disturbed by later structures.

Is the place situated in an urban or significantly urbanized area:

– Yes

↳ Is there a distinct boundary between the place and the urban fabric:

– No

Notes: The building was found within the city walls of ancient Pharsalos in the east-central part of the city. It was located among other incompletely-preserved buildings that the excavators interpreted to be non-domestic.

↳ Is the place located significantly within the urban fabric:

Is the place centrally located, or at the crossroads of significant pathways?

– Yes

Notes: It was located 500 m away from the ancient city centre and would have been easily accessible as it was located immediately east of a beaten-earth road.

Is the place situated in a rural setting:

– No

Is the place situated far removed from non-religious places of habitation:

– No

Notes: Although located in a non-residential sector of the city, the residential areas are not far.

Structures Present

Are there structures or features present:

Instructions: Answer once for each structure/feature or group that can be differentiated.

– Yes



A single structure

– Yes



The structure has a definite shape

– Rectangular

Notes: The building is not fully preserved due to disturbance from later periods but a rectilinear building with multiple internal subdivisions survives covering an area of 8.85 x 5.10 m.



One single feature

– Other [specify]: NA



A group of structures:

– Yes



Are they part of a single design/construction stage:

– Yes

Notes: It consists of a single building but with multiple subdivisions/structures/perhaps rooms inside.



A group of features:

– Yes

↳ Are they part of a single design/construction stage:

– Yes

↳ Is it part of a larger place/sanctuary:

– No

Notes: It probably was not part of a larger sanctuary and the sanctuary probably consisted of the building alone (because of its identification as a metroon, whose activities are conducted within a building) but I do need to note that the full extent of the sanctuary does not survive.

↳ What is the function of the structure/feature or group:

Answer "Yes" once for each distinct function

– Worship

↳ Worship:

– Individual

– Worship

↳ Worship:

– Communal

↳ Is the structure/feature finished:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature intended to last beyond a generation:

– Yes

Notes: It lasted for over 2 centuries.

↳ Was the structure/feature modified through time:

– Yes

Notes: The building seems to have undergone several structural modifications prior to its destruction. The western façade was moved slightly and a small, east-facing room (1.74 x 1.76 m) abutting the western wall was added.

↳ Was the structure/feature destroyed:

– Yes

↳ How was the structure/feature destroyed

– Collapsed

Notes: The sanctuary went out of use in the 2nd c. BCE and was never reused. It deteriorated over time and its foundations built over by later structures.

↳ Was it destroyed deliberately:

– For religious reasons

– For economic reasons

– For political reasons

– As the result of war

– Other [specify]: It was a mixture of various factors. The Macedonians were forced out the region after their defeat by the Romans at Kynoskephalai in 197 BC, removing the incentive for Thessalians to keep participating in a cult that was associated with the Macedonians. Most of the Thessalian cults that persisted after this time period were perceived to be local religious traditions rather than foreign.

↳ Was it destroyed by accident/natural phenomena:

– Other [specify]: It went out of use in the 2nd c. BC, which, I argue, is connected to the end of the Macedonian hegemony over Thessaly. The cult of Kybele/Mother of the Gods seems to have been connected to the Macedonians in the region and when they left, the incentive to participate in the cult disappeared.

↳ Has the structure/feature been reconstructed:

– No

Reasons for Creation/Construction/Consecration

Is the place used for the worship of/communication with non-human supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Dedicated to a supernatural being:

– Yes [specify]: Kybele/Mother of the Gods

Notes: The excavator, Stella Katakouta, cautions against being too certain in identifying this building as a Metroon, as it could also have been a meeting place for associations.

↳ Dedicated to more than one supernatural being:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The cult of Kybele/Mother of the Gods is usually associated with the simultaneous worship of other deities and semi-divine figures (Aphrodite, Attis, etc.) but no evidence has been found of them here.

Is the place used for the worship of a semi-divine human being:

– No

Is the place used for the worship of non-divine ancestors:

– No

Was the place commissioned/built by an official political entity:

A political entity is a local power structure that leverages a workforce.

– Field doesn't know

Notes: We do not know who commissioned the building although it is likely that the polis of Pharsalos was involved.

Were the Structures built by specific groups of people:

– Field doesn't know

Was the place thought to have originated as the result of divine intervention:

– No

Was the place created to mark or commemorate the birthplace of a supernatural or human being:

– No

Was the place created as the result of an event:

– No

Was the creation of the place sponsored by an external financial/material donation:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Although it is uncertain, I would believe it possible that the Macedonian rulers of Thessaly patronized this sanctuary as it was only in existence during Macedonian hegemony.

Was the establishment of the place motivated by:

– Expectation of favor in return

Was the place built specifically for housing scriptures/sacred texts:

– No

Design and Material Remains

Overall Structure

Is the place made up of multiple built structures:

– No

Is monumental architecture present:

Monumental architecture is defined here as a built structure that surpasses average human proportions and in general is larger and more complex than is necessary to fulfill the structure's utilitarian function(s). Examples of monumental architecture include Mesopotamian Ziggurats, Egyptian Pyramids, Greek and Roman temples, Mesoamerican Pyramids, North American and Aegean burial mounds, etc.

– No

Is the structure/feature made out of natural materials:

Answer [Yes] for each material type

– No

Is the structure/feature made out of human-made materials

– Yes [specify]: stone walls, beaten earth floor, mudbrick superstructure

Decoration

Is decoration present:

– Yes

↳ Is decoration part of the building (permanent):

– No

↳ Is decoration attached to the building, i.e. movable reliefs or tapestries

– Yes

Notes: terracotta plaques

↳ Is the decoration figural:

A figural representation is defined here as one that contains the depiction of discernible human, anthropomorphic, animal, or zoomorphic forms. In general, it differentiates between animate and inanimate beings, as well as between narrative compositions and still life, landscapes, abstraction, etc. Answer [Yes] for each type of figure depicted

– Yes

↳ Are there gods depicted:

– Yes

↳ Are there other supernatural beings depicted:

– No

↳ Are there humans depicted:

– Yes

↳ Are there animals depicted:

– Yes

↳ Are there animal-human hybrids depicted:

– No

↳ Is the decoration non-figural:

– No

↳ Is the decoration hidden or restricted from view:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Because the site is not well preserved, we do not know whether there were decorations on the exterior of the building that would have been visible from the street.

– No

Notes: The terracotta plaques found inside the building would have been meant to be seen by those inside the building (probably initiates).

↳ Are there statues present:

– Yes

↳ Cult statues:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: It is not certain whether the terracotta statuettes included a cult statue or whether these were simply votive offerings.

↳ Statues of gods/supernatural beings:

– Yes

Notes: Terracotta figurines

↳ Statues of humans:

– Yes

Notes: Terracotta figurines and protomai

↳ Other [Specify]

–Other [specify]: Nothing else

↳ Are there reliefs present:

A relief as opposed to sculpture carved on the round is a work of sculpture in which the figures project from a background support, generally a flat surface. Reliefs can be carved out of stone, clay, or a similar material.

– Yes

↳ Reliefs representing the god(s) worshipped at the place:

– Yes

Notes: Terracotta plaques

↳ Reliefs representing mythological narratives:

– No

↳ Reliefs representing human/historical narratives:

– No

↳ Other [Specify]

–Other [specify]: All the figurines, plaques, and protomai only depict female figures.

↳ Are there paintings present:

– No

↳ Are there mosaics present:

– No

↳ Are there inscriptions as part of the decoration:

– No

↳ Other type of decoration:

–Yes [specify]: The terracotta plaques and figurines were probably painted but the paint no

longer survives.

Iconography

Are there distinct features in the places iconography:

– No

Beliefs and Practices

Funerary Associations

Is this place a tomb/burial:

– No

Is this a place for the worship of the dead:

– No

Is this a place for treatment of the corpse:

– No

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

Co-sacrifices are animal/human sacrifices prompted by the death of the primary occupant of the tomb/burial.

– No

Are grave goods present:

– No

Are formal burials present:

– No

Supernatural Beings

Is a supreme high god is present:

– No

Does the supreme high god communicate with the living at this place:

– Field doesn't know

Are previously human spirits present:

– Field doesn't know

Do human spirits communicate with the living at this place:

– Field doesn't know

Are nonhuman supernatural beings present:

– Field doesn't know

Do nonhuman spirits communicate with the living at this place:

– Field doesn't know

Are mixed human-divine beings present:

– Field doesn't know

Do mixed human-divine beings communicate with the living at this place:

– Field doesn't know

Is the supernatural being/high god present in the form of a cult statue(s):

– No

Supernatural Interactions

Is supernatural monitoring present:

– Field doesn't know

Do visitors communicate with the gods or supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Do visitors communicate with gods:

– Yes

↳ Do visitors communicate with other supernatural beings:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The cult of the Mother of the Gods/Kybele is often associated with Attis, a semi-divine, formerly mortal figure, evidence for whom was not found in this sanctuary,

Ritual and Performance

Sacrifices, Offerings, and Maintenance

Are sacrifices performed at this place:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Sacrifices likely took place within the building, as it did in other Metroa, but due to the disturbed nature of the site, no faunal remains or traces of burning were collected/published.

Are there self-sacrifices present:

– No

Are material offerings present:

– Yes



Are material offerings mandatory:

– Field doesn't know



Are material offerings composed of valuable objects:

– Yes

Notes: I hesitate to indicate "yes" as there were no precious metals or stone found at the site but a significant number of black-glossed ceramics of fine craftsmanship were excavated, as well as kernoi (vessels with multiple cups attached, intended to hold liquid offerings), an elaborate thymiaterion (incense burner), and miniature pottery (which involved intricate craftsmanship).



Are material offerings composed of daily-life objects:

– Yes

Notes: Ceramic vessel types included kantharoi, handle-less skyphidia, lekane lids, lamps, a cup, a stamnoid pyxis, terracotta plaques of various sizes, a small kalykoid kantharos, and a small amount of loomweights.



Are material offerings interred at this place (in caches):

– Yes

Notes: There seem to have been votive deposits within the building.



Other

– Other [specify]: The terracotta plaques and figurines seem to have been concentrated in a small room

Is attendance to worship/sacrifice mandatory:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: As the cult of Kybele/Mother of the Gods was a mystery cult, not a lot is known of the ritual details (including what was and what was not compulsory).

Is maintenance of the place performed:

– Yes

↳ Is it required:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Is there cleansing (for the maintenance):

– Field doesn't know

Notes: It is likely as in other metra within the region (e.g. Demetrias, Chani Kokkonas), there were ritual basins found within the buildings. None have survived at the Pharsalos Metroon.

↳ Are there periodic repairs/reconstructions:

– Yes

Notes: Multiple additions were made to the building.

↳ Is the maintenance performed by permanent staff:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Other

– Other [specify]: Maintenance continued only until the 2nd c. BC. After the Macedonians left Thessaly, there no longer seemed to have been any incentive to maintain the sanctuary.

Pilgrimage and Festivals

Are pilgrimages present:

– Field doesn't know

Is this place a venue for feasting:

– Yes

↳ Is feasting connected to the worship/sacrifices performed at this place:

– Yes

↳ Is feasting sponsored by the same entity that built/maintains the place:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: There is archaeological evidence for commensality within the building but whether this was sponsored by the administrators of the sanctuary or by private individuals is not known.

↳ Does feasting occur in a specific location within the place:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The finds were unfortunately very disturbed within the building and we cannot point to which rooms were intended specifically for feasting.

Are festivals present:

– Field doesn't know

Divination and Healing

Is divination present:

– No

Is healing present/practiced at this place:

– Field doesn't know

Do rituals occur at this place:

Rituals are visibly enacted behaviors by one or more people for the purposes of religious observance.

– Yes

↳ Do large-scale rituals take place:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Do small-scale rituals take place:

– Yes

↳ On average how many participants are present in large-scale rituals:

– specify: Uncertain

↳ How often do these rituals take place:

– specify: Unknown

↳ Are there orthodoxy checks:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Are there orthopraxy checks:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Are there synchronic practices:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Probably, but we cannot tell from the archaeological evidence alone.

↳ Are there intoxicants used during the ritual:

– Yes

Notes: Wine was likely used during feasting and libations based on the types of vessels found.

Institutions and Scriptures

Religious Specialists

Are religious specialists present/in charge of this place:

Religious specialists are individuals whose primary duties within a population group are not concerned with subsistence or craft production but the maintenance of the religious landscape and culture of the group.

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Probably

Does this place incorporate a living space for religious specialists:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: It is likely that parts of the building were used to house staff but the primary purpose of the building does not seem to be domestic.

Is this place used for the training of religious specialists:

– Field doesn't know

Are there formal institutions for the maintenance of the place:

Institutions that are authorized by the religious community or political leaders

– Field doesn't know

Bureaucracy

Is there a formal bureaucracy present at this place:

A bureaucracy consists of a hierarchical system of accounting and rule maintenance primarily concerned with material wealth.

– Field doesn't know

Does this place control economic resources (land, goods, tools):

– No

Public Works

Does this place serve as a location for services to the community:

– No

Writing/Scriptures

Is non-religious writing stored at this place:

Economic documents, records etc.

– No

Are there scriptures associated with this place:

– No

Bibliography

Entry/Answer References

Reference: Maria Mili. *Religion and Society in Ancient Thessaly*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Reference: Gino Canlas. *Sacred Space and Community Identities: Sanctuaries in Broader Thessaly from the Archaic to the Early Imperial Periods*. PhD Dissertation. University of Alberta.

Reference: Stella Katakouta. Οδός Καναδά (Ο.Τ. 442 Β, οικόπεδο Δ. Κυρίτση).