

The Metroon at Demetrias

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During rescue excavations (1988-1990) at the Zerva Plot in the area of Magoula Pefkakia (less than 1 km S of the port of Volos) within the territory of ancient Demetrias, was a building with rooms surrounding a peristylar courtyard. The excavator, Anthi Batziou-Efstathiou originally interpreted it as a house but later proposed that the building was the city of Demetrias' official Metroon (sanctuary to the Mother of the Gods), which is supported by the royal stamps on its roof tiles. Maria Mili points to the complexities of interpreting such spaces and suggests that it could also be the location for the private thiasos of a high-status worshippers in the cult of Kybele/Mother of the Gods.

Date Range: 250 BCE - 150 BCE

Region: The Metroon at Demetrias

Region tags: Europe, Southeastern Europe, Southern Europe, Eastern Mediterranean, Greece, Aegean, Balkans

The proposed Metroon at Demetrias is located at the Zerva plot in Magoula Pefkakia, less than 1 km across the water from the city of Volos.

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: Batziou-Efstathiou, A. 1989. "Demetriada." *Archaiologikon Deltion* 44, B1: 227-228.
- Source 2: Batziou-Efstathiou, A. 1990. "Demetriada." *Archaiologikon Deltion* 45, B1: 201.
- Source 3: Batziou-Efstathiou, A. 2002. *Demetrias*. Athens:31-32.

Online Sources

Online sources used for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: <http://atlasthessalias.culture.gr/-----1.html>
- Source 1 Description: Archaeological atlas of Thessaly. Information is the sentence prior to footnote 21.

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: Rescue Excavation



Years of excavation:

– Year range: 1988-1990



Name of excavation

– Official or descriptive name: Δημητριάδα - Οικόπεδο Ζέρβα

Topographical Context

Is the place associated with a feature in the landscape

– Elevation



Type of elevation

– Hill

Does the place involve human-made features besides structure:

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

– No

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



Is the place located significantly within the urban fabric:

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

– Yes

Notes: The sanctuary was located within the walls of the city in a neighbourhood

Is the place situated in a rural setting:

– No

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

– No

Notes: Located next to houses

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 entire extent of the building has not been entirely exposed, but most likely rectangular in shape



One single feature

–Other [specify]: N/a



A group of structures:

– No



A group of features:

– No



Is it part of a larger place/sanctuary:

– No



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

Answer "Yes" once for each distinct function

– Worship

- ↳ Worship:
 - Communal

- Sacrificial

- ↳ Is the structure/feature finished:
 - Yes

- ↳ Was the structure/feature intended to last beyond a generation:
 - Field doesn't know
 - Notes: Regardless of intent the structure was in use for longer than a generation

- ↳ Was the structure/feature modified through time:
 - Yes
 - Notes: Unsure when it was modified but the building was renovated and a wall was erected between the columns, dividing the courtyard in two unequal parts

- ↳ Was the structure/feature destroyed:
 - No

- ↳ 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]: Mother of the Gods (Kybele)

- ↳ Dedicated to more than one supernatural being:
 - No

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.

– Yes



Specify

– King or emperor

Notes: Rooftiles were found with an inscription of "Basileus" meaning they were royally funded

Were the Structures built by specific groups of people:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The structure may have originally been a house and later became a place to worship Cybele

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

Was the establishment of the place motivated by:

– Expression of devotion with no expectation of favor in return

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

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Finds from the sanctuary include one large and two small thymiateria in the northeastern area of the courtyard, along with numerous terracotta figurines, and pieces of small clay, decorated altars.

Design and Material Remains

Overall Structure

Is the place made up of multiple built structures:

– No

Notes: A singular building was discovered with rooms surrounding a peristylar courtyard with four unfluted, poros, Doric columns on each side

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

– Yes

Notes: The structure was made out of local stone that was shaped by humans for the construction of the metroon

↳ Earth

– No

↳ Sand

– No

↳ Clay

– No

↳ Plaster

– No

↳ Wood

– No

↳ Grass

– No

↳ Stone

– Yes

↳ Is this material sourced locally:

– Yes

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:

– No

↳ Other

– Other [specify]: N/a

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

– No

Decoration

Is decoration present:

– No

Notes: Doric columns were discovered in the structure

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:

– Yes

↳ Are they anthropomorphic:

– No

↳ Are they sky deity:

– No

↳ Are they chthonic (underworld)

– No

↳ Are they fused with king/kingship role (king = high god)

– No

↳ Are they the monarch is seen as a manifestation or emanation of the high god:

– No

↳ Are they kin relation to elites:

– No

↳ Are they other type of loyalty or connection to elites:

– No

↳ Are they unquestionably good:

– Yes

↳ Are they other:

– Other [specify]: The goddess Kybele associated with the sanctuary, was worshipped as Mother of the Gods.

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

– Field doesn't know

Notes: There is no evidence to suggest this would have happened, but as worship was performed there is the possibility.

Are previously human spirits present:

– No

Do human spirits communicate with the living at this place:

– No

Are nonhuman supernatural beings present:

– No

Do nonhuman spirits communicate with the living at this place:

– No

Are mixed human-divine beings present:

– No

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

– No

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

– No

Notes: Although terracotta figurines of multiple gods are present in the courtyard of the building: Zeus Meilichios, Aphrodite, Ennodia, Hekate, and the Mother of the Gods (Kybele).

Supernatural Interactions

Is supernatural monitoring present:

– No

Do visitors communicate with the gods or supernatural beings:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Worshippers presumably worshipped the goddess Kybele, but whether they actively communicated with the goddess is unknown.

Ritual and Performance

Sacrifices, Offerings, and Maintenance

Are sacrifices performed at this place:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: As only terracotta figurines and household objects were discovered at the site, it is unclear what if any sacrifices were performed

Are there self-sacrifices present:

– No

Are material offerings present:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Terracotta figurines are present, but it is unknown if these were offerings.

Is attendance to worship/sacrifice mandatory:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Very little is known about the workings of the sanctuary.

Is maintenance of the place performed:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: It is unknown what maintenance took place.

Pilgrimage and Festivals

Are pilgrimages present:

– No

Notes: It is unlikely this was more than a local cult..

Is this place a venue for feasting:

– No

Notes: This structure may have been a house, but it is unlikely any form of feasting took place in the building.

Are festivals present:

– Yes



Frequency of festivals

– specify: It is unclear how frequent the festival was, but in Thessalian society most cults were associated with a festival of some sort



Do all members of the society participate in the festival(s):

– Only locals



Are festivals a defining element in the construction/decoration of the place:

– No

Notes: It probably started as a household cult, but as royal involvement is assumed, it probably developed into a very local festival.



On average, how many participants gather at this place:

– number: It is unknown who exactly participated.



Is feasting part of the festival(s):

– No

Notes: There does not appear to be evidence of feasting

Divination and Healing

Is divination present:

– No

Is healing present/practiced at this place:

– No

Do rituals occur at this place:

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

– Field doesn't know

Notes: It is unclear what rituals if any took place, but as this was a sanctuary to a particular deity, it is

likely some form of ritual would have taken place

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: Not much is known about the workings of the sanctuary. It may have involved high-class members gathering for worship, but it is unknown if priests or other religious specialists would have been involved.

Does this place incorporate a living space for religious specialists:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The sanctuary was previously believed to be a house based on the peristylar courtyard and the three rooms east of the courtyard, so it is plausible that if there were religious specialists they may have been able to live in the sanctuary.

Is this place used for the training of religious specialists:

– No

Notes: This would have been a place to gather for worship either just among a household, or amongst a small community of members.

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

Notes: There is no formal indication found so far indicating for maintenance of the sanctuary.

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

Notes: Previously believed to be a household cult, the presence of a roof tile with a royal stamp indicates it may have been more than that, and Maria Mili suggests a private group of high status worshippers may have been present at the cult.

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

– No

Notes: As this is a very small sanctuary, even though there appears to be royal involvement, it is very unlikely that this sanctuary controlled economic resources.

Public Works

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

– Field doesn't know

Notes: It is possible elites from the community gathered here to worship, but it is unclear what else may have occurred here.

Writing/Scriptures

Is non-religious writing stored at this place:

Economic documents, records etc.

– No

Notes: There is no evidence of any writing from within the building.

Are there scriptures associated with this place:

– No

Notes: There is no known scriptures associated with the sanctuary either from within or from other locations.

Bibliography

General References

Reference: Sofia Kravaritou. Synoecism and religious interface in Demetrias (Thessaly). *Kernos*, 24(1) issn: 2034-7871. doi: 10.4000/kernos.1942.

Reference: Maria Mili. *Religion and Society in Ancient Thessaly*. Oxford University Press, USA. isbn: 9780198718017.