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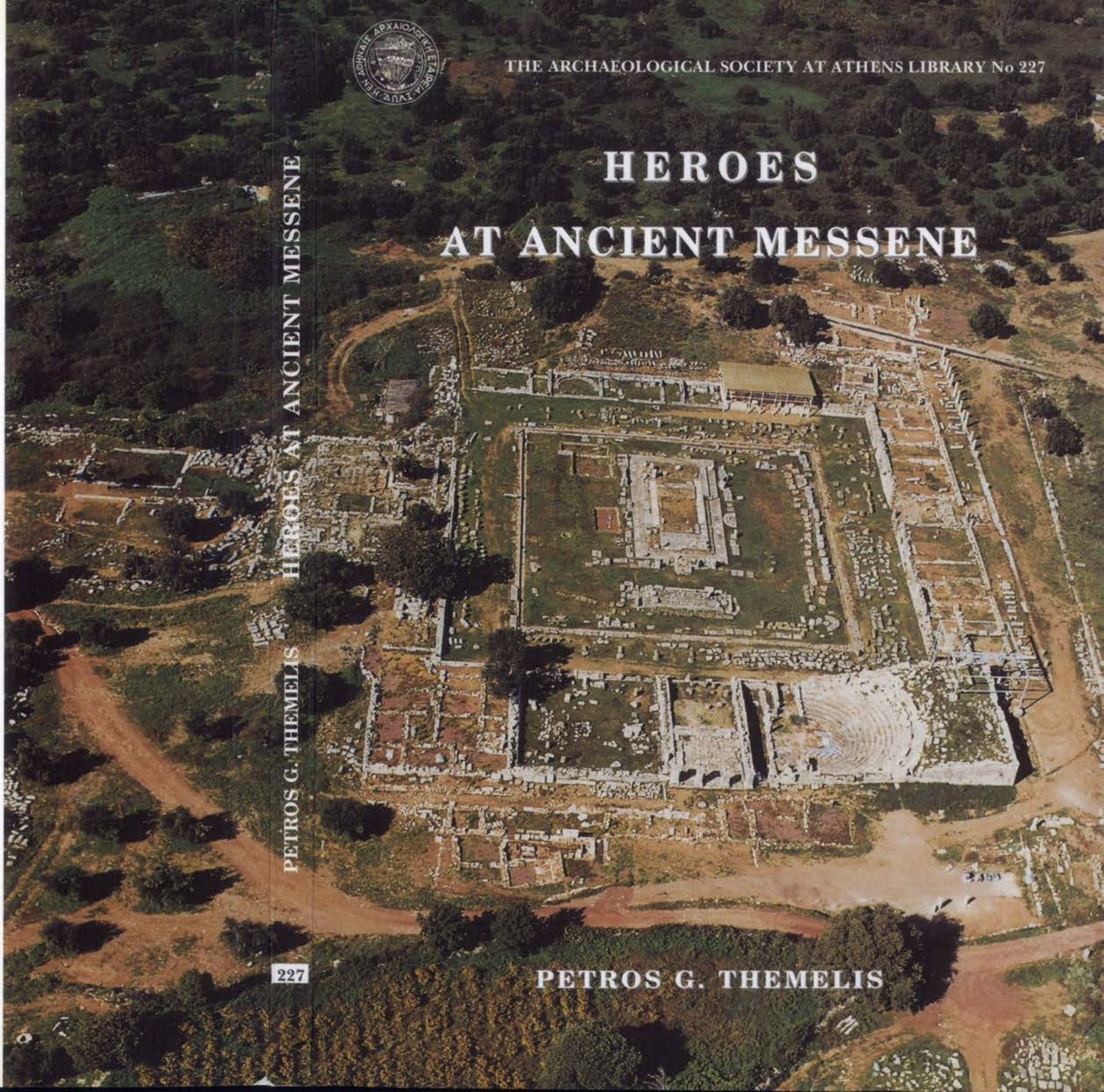
# HEROES AT ANCIENT MESSENE

PETROS G. THEMELIS HEROES AT ANCIENT MESSENE

227

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**HEROES  
AT ANCIENT MESSENE**



The Asklepieion from the east.

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ANCIENT SITES AND MUSEUMS IN GREECE

27

PETROS G. THEMELIS

**HEROES**  
**AT ANCIENT MESSENE**

TRANSLATED BY TIMOTHY CULLEN



ATHENS 2003

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*Cover illustration:* Aerial photograph of the Asklepieion from the east.



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The north and west stoas of the Gymnasium from the north-east.



The courtyard of the Asklepieion from the north-west.





Fig. 1. Aerial view of the old Voulkano Monastery on the acropolis of Ithome.

## Introduction

Ancient Greek cities used heroes to define their political identity and the extent of the territory under their rule, and so the main forms of hero worship presuppose the existence of a city. In Messenia, and especially around Mount Ithome, some towns came into being at a relatively early period. This was before the Spartan conquest, which prevented their evolution into more complex forms of civic organization and the development of an urban mentality. The Spartan occupation did not completely stifle the sense of national identity of the inhabitants of these towns, two of which, Ithome, named after the mountain, and Aithaie, mentioned by Thucydides (I.101), seem to have had the character

of perioecic towns. The revolution of the inhabitants of these towns after the earthquake of 464 B.C., when they took refuge on the acropolis of Ithome and there made their last glorious stand, shows that they still retained their sense of nationality (figs 1-2).

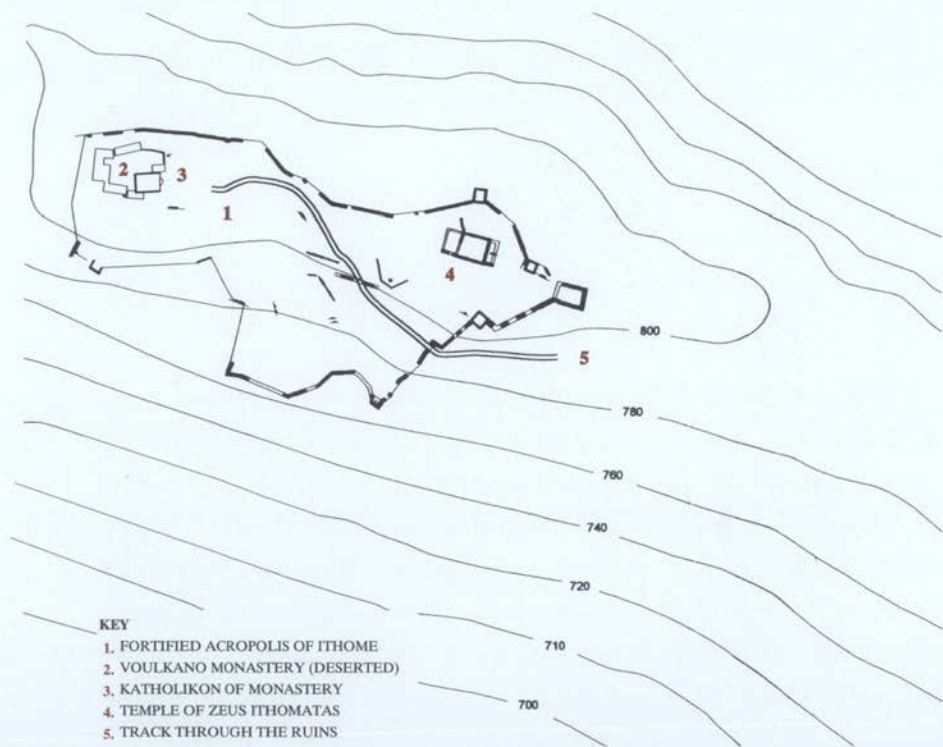


Fig. 2. Plan of the acropolis of Ithome, with the sanctuary of Zeus Ithomatas.

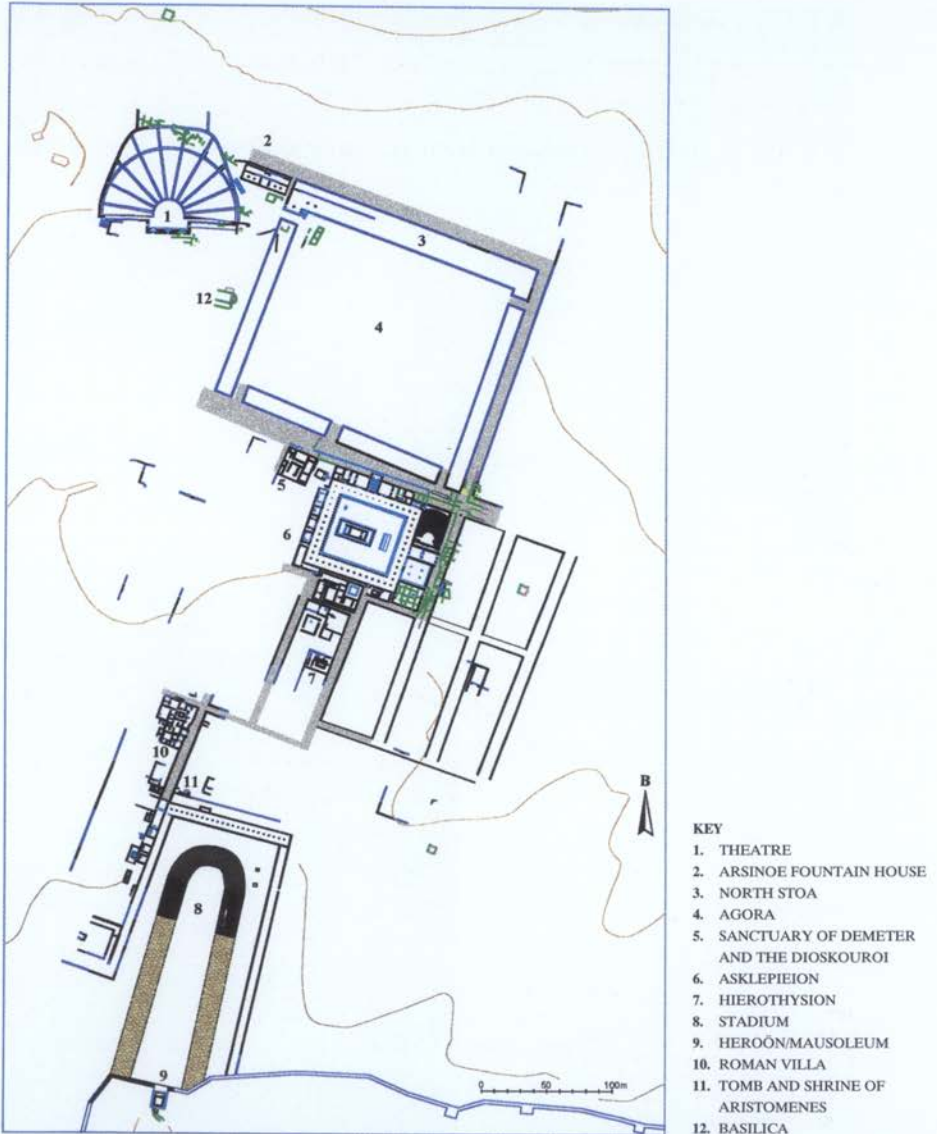


Fig. 3. Central part of the city; Hippodamian town plan.



Fig. 4. Tower on the west side of the fortification walls. Fig. 5. Tower 17, north-east of the Arcadian Gate.



Fig. 6. View of the Arcadian Gate and Tower 17 (aerial photo).

Among the major factors behind the resilience of the Messenians and their resistance to being ethnically assimilated by the Lakonians were the preservation of local cults (especially hero cults), their collective memory of the exploits of legendary figures such as Aristomenes and the unquenchable longing of the dispersed Messenians to return to a homeland restored to liberty. Their "resistance" was no longer expressed in open conflict against the conquerors but took the form of a "long revolution" or "cultural resistance", in the terminology used by modern social anthropologists to define similar phenomena in their fields of study.

After 369 B.C., when the capital of the new, autonomous Messenia was founded by Epameinondas, the Messenians made all haste to regain their lost territory and bridge the gap caused by the long Spartan occupation. The city was famous for its mighty fortification walls, the monumentality of its public buildings and its Hippodamian town plan (figs 3-6). In their new city the Messenians lost no time in reintroducing cults dating back to their distant pre-Dorian and Dorian past, which they had practised when they were living outside Messenia, as well as cults of local heroes from their more recent history, such as Aristomenes and Epameinondas. According to Pausanias (IV.27.6-7), when they were preparing to build the new city the Messenians and their priests offered sacrifices to Zeus Ithomatas and the Dioskouroi (fig. 7), to the Great Goddesses Demeter and Kore and to Kaukon, the mythical founder of the Andanian Mysteries. Then they invoked all their national heroes and besought them to come back to live

with them in their new city. In particular, they prayed to Messene, the mythical first queen of Messenia; to Eurytos and Aphareus with their sons Idas and Lynkeus; and to Kresphontes and Aipyros, two of the Herakleidai. Most of all, however, they begged Aristomenes to return.

In this paper I shall not be concerned with the Messenian cult of Herakles, a Panhellenic demigod, nor of the Dioskouroi, but primarily with the cults of the Messenian people's semi-mythical



Fig. 7. Votive relief representing the Dioskouroi as horsemen.



and semi-historical progenitors, such as Aristomenes and Messene, their first queen (fig. 8), and of historical founders of their city, such as Epameinondas. However, I shall also consider the cult of the Athenian hero Theseus, because the presence of a statue of him in the Messene gymnasium is of special interest. I shall also discuss the heroization and the posthumous award of the highest honours to distinguished citizens such as Damophon, Saithidas and other named and unnamed "noble" Messenians, whose privileges included the right to build their families' imposing grave monuments inside the city walls.



Fig. 8. The turreted head of the deified Queen Messene. Bronze coin.

### **Ancestors and founder heroes**

The cult of Messene, the city's eponymous heroine, daughter of Triopas and wife of Polykaon, the first king of Messenia, is attested both in literature and in inscriptions and is depicted on the city's coins (fig. 8). Messene, although a woman, may be described as the mythical founder of the Messenian race and the eponymous heroine of their capital, just as Autonoe, the daughter of Kepheus, was the mythical founder of Mantinea. Queen Messene is credited with having officially established the Eleusinian Mysteries at Andania after Kaukon had brought them there (Paus. IV.1.9). The person who first paid her the honours due to a hero was the devout Messenian king Glaukos, son of Aipyros (Paus. IV.3.9-10).

Pausanias saw a temple with a gold and marble (chrysolithic) cult statue of her in the sanctuary of Asklepios at Messene (IV.31.11), but his description of the sanctuary (IV.31.11-12) does not help to resolve the question whether the great Doric temple in the middle of its peristyle courtyard was dedicated to Asklepios, Messene or both of them. On the evidence of Pausanias, coupled with the results of archaeological and epigraphical research, it seems reasonable to conclude that the temple was dedicated not to Asklepios alone but also to Messene, the national heroine (figs 9-10). It would have been quite possible for Messene and Asklepios to be worshipped together not just in the same sanctuary but actually in the same temple, as mythical pre-Dorian rulers of Messenia.

In the same passage (IV.31.11-12) Pausanias describes the paintings of the thirteen pre-Dorian kings and queens of Messenia belonging to the powerful royal families descended from Aphareus,

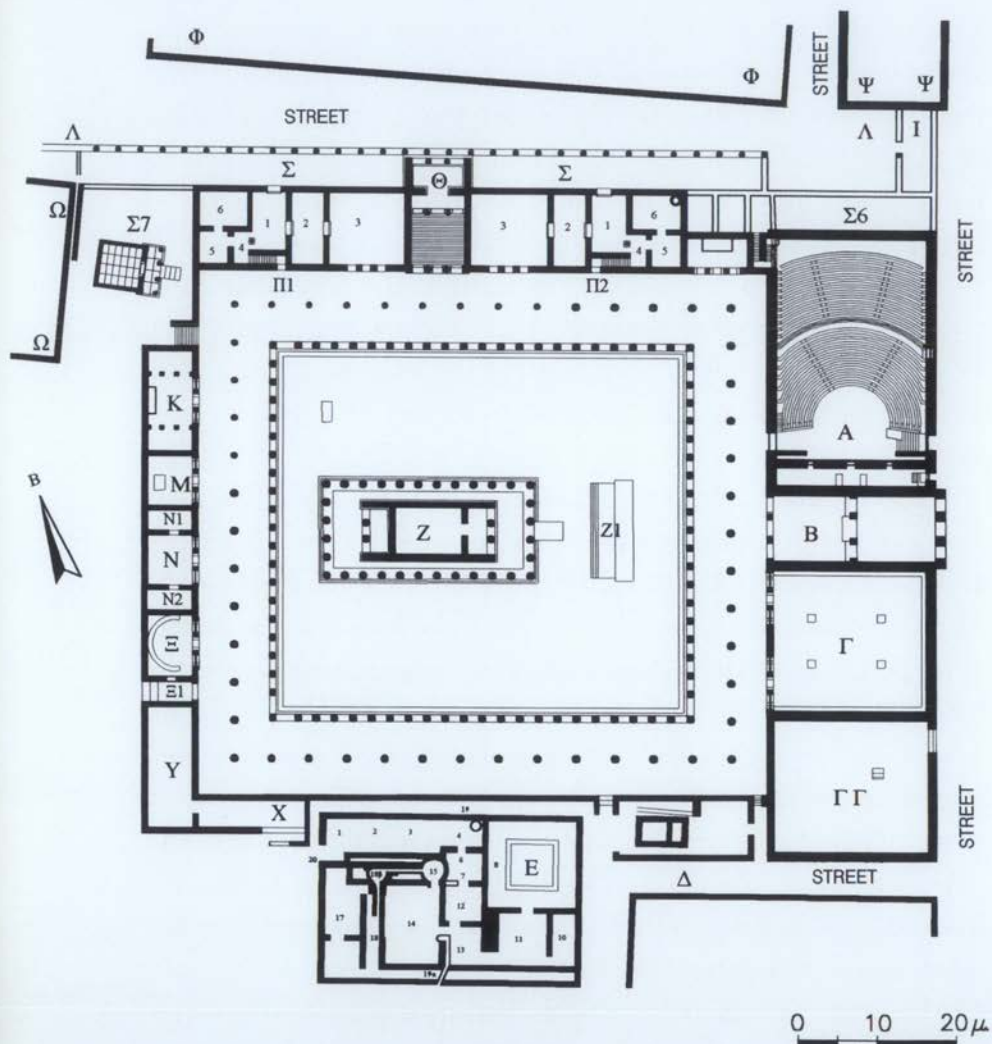


Fig. 9. Ground plan of the Asklepieion.

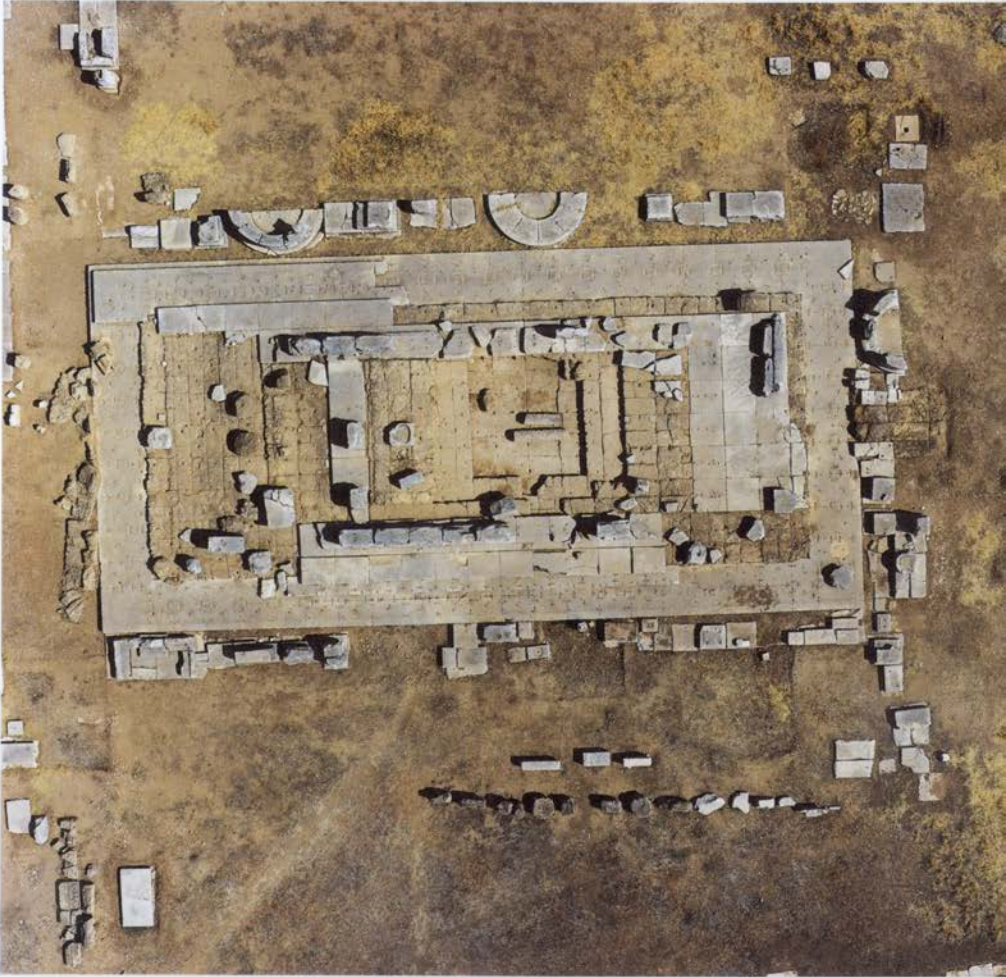


Fig. 10. The great Doric temple of Asklepios and Messene.

Neleus and Leukippos, which he saw in the opisthodomos of the temple of Messene. These were Aphareus and his sons Idas and Lynkeus, Nestor and his sons Thrasymedes and Antilochos, Leukippos and his three daughters Hilaeira, Phoibe and Arsinoe (mother of Asklepios), Asklepios and his sons Machaon and Podaleirios. There was also an image of Kresphontes, the first Dorian king of Messenia (fig. 11).

The Archaic, Classical and Early Hellenistic votive offerings found in the deepest layers of the south courtyard of the Asklepieion (figs 12-15) appear to have been dedicated to Asklepios as a Messenian king, a hero and a healer, and also to a chthonic he-

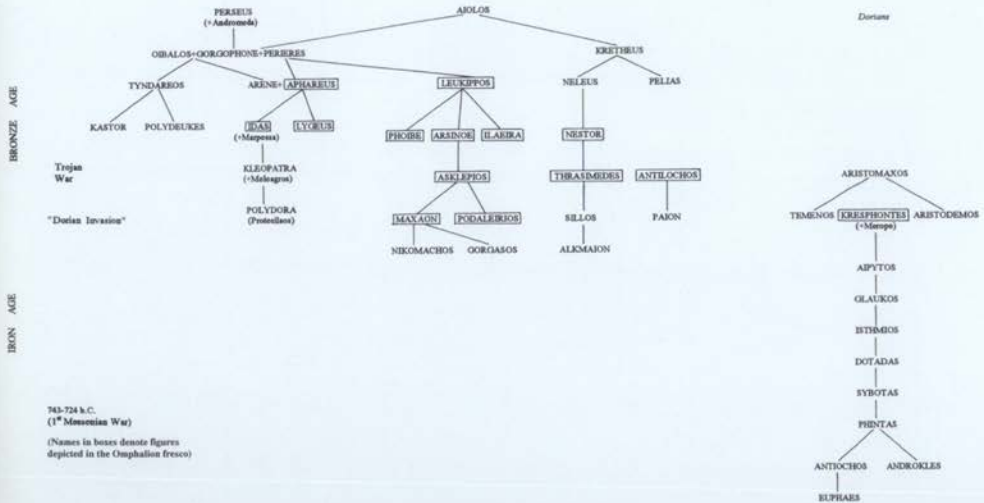


Fig. 11. Family tree of the royal houses of Messenia (Paus. 4, 2, 1-7, 3, 2, 31, 11-12).

roine who is probably to be identified with Messene. In a series of terracotta votive plaques the venerated heroine (Messene) is represented seated on a throne and receiving offerings (fig. 12).



Fig. 12. Terracotta plaque: seated goddess receiving offerings. Fig. 13. Bronze eye: votive offering from a patient. Figs 14-15. Terracotta foot and hand dedicated by patients.

Arsinoe, the daughter of Leukippos and mother of Asklepios, was another who was traditionally accorded heroic honours at Messene. Her name was given to the main fountain house situated in the agora (fig. 16). However, although she had a sanctuary dedicated to her at Sparta (Paus. III.12.8), no such shrine has yet been found at Messene, nor any objects connected with her cult. Arsinoe's sisters Hilaeira and Phoibe, who married the Dioskouroi, were also worshipped at Sparta, where their priestesses were



Fig. 16. Aerial view of the Arsinoe fountain house from the south-west.

called Leukippides (Paus. III.16.1), and there were images of them in the temple of the Dioskouroi at Argos (Paus. II.22.6). A marble sculptural group depicting the abduction of the daughters of Leukippos by the Dioskouroi stood in front of the sanctuary of Demeter and the Dioskouroi at Messene (Paus. IV.31.9): some of the votive offerings found in that sanctuary were evidently connected with their cult, notably a number of terracotta plaques with relief representations of triads (figs 17a-b).



Figs 17a-b. Votive plaques depicting female triads.



### The cult of Aristomenes

In the gymnasium at Messene Pausanias saw statues of Hermes, Herakles and Theseus, the patrons of young manhood, as well as the tomb and shrine of Aristomenes, where bulls were sacrificed in a divinatory rite (figs 18-19). Pausanias's testimony on the subject of this rite is confirmed by the inscription *SEG* 23, 205.207



Fig. 18. Partial view of the Gymnasium from the west.

and 35, 343. Pausanias (IV.24.3) also informs us that the Rhodians and Damagetos, king of Ialysos, who was married to Aristomenes's daughter, established a cult of Aristomenes, centred on his tomb, after he died.

Unfortunately not a single pictorial or sculptural representation of this Messenian hero has come down to the present day. To judge by the traditions associated with his name, especially the story of his supernatural appearance at the battle of Leuktra and the dedication of his eagle-emblazoned shield to the oracle of Tro-



Fig. 19. The west stoa of the Gymnasium, where the statues of Hermes, Herakles and Theseus were found.

phonios, it seems reasonable to conclude that the lost statue of him that stood on an inscribed base built into the wall of the Early Christian basilica at Messene depicted him as a hoplite (figs 20-21). His feats of superhuman daring and his victories over the Spartans were the stuff of legend. They were woven into an epic lamenting the woes of the enslaved Messenians, which was recited by the local women even during his own lifetime and were still



Fig. 20. Nave of the Christian basilica from the south. Statue bases for Aristomenes and Alexander on either side of the apse.

to be heard centuries later; Pausanias himself (IV.16.6-7) heard it in the second century A.D. and recorded two lines from it:

ἔς τε μέσον πεδίων Στενυκλήριον ἔς τ' ὄρος ἄκρον  
εἶπετ' Ἀριστομένης τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις.

“Down in Stenyklaros’ plain and on the mountain’s peak  
chased Aristomenes the Lakedaimonians”.



Fig. 21. Inscribed base for a statue of Aristomenes.

The Messenians looked upon Aristomenes as their special protector: among other things, his appearance on the field at the crucial battle of Leuktra in 371 B.C., which led to the foundation of the new Messene on the slopes of Mt. Ithome two years later, was a decisive factor in Epameinondas's victory (Paus. IV.32.4). The hero's shrine recently discovered next to the propylon of the Messene gymnasium is probably to be identified as the Classical and Hellenistic shrine at the tomb of Aristomenes (figs 22-24), which was removed during the Roman period. Most of the terracotta votive plaques discovered in the shrine depict the hero either reclining at a banquet or as a warrior (fig. 25). Among the pottery found here – miniatures as well as normal-sized vessels – are a number of small incense-burners characteristic of the cult (fig. 26).

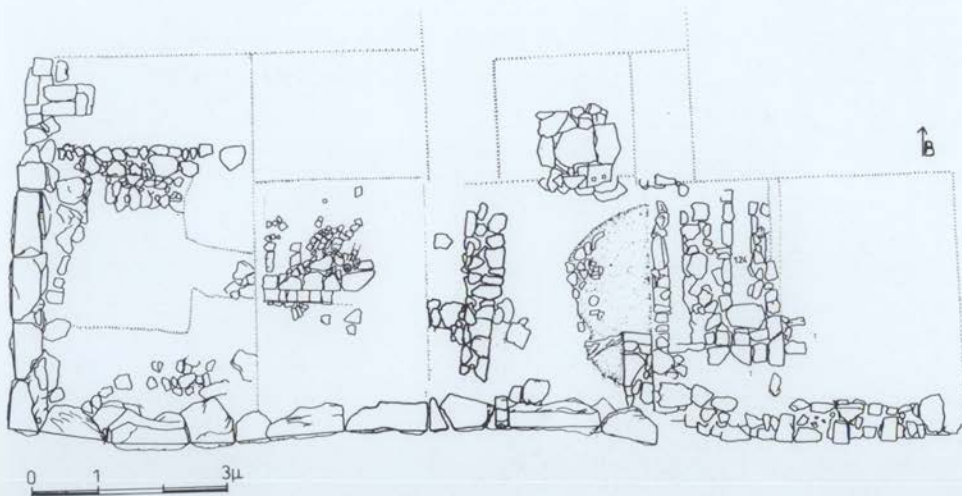


Fig. 22. Ground plan of a hero shrine, most probably of Aristomenes.



Figs 23-24. Partial view of the probable hero shrine of Aristomenes.



Fig. 25. Votive plaques representing the hero reclining or as a warrior.

Fig. 26. Clay incense-burners.

The Messenians, fighting for their very existence, were unable to take part in the Persian Wars of 490-479 B.C. and so to share with the rest of the Greeks the memory of the glorious repulse of the barbarians. Even after more than half a millennium the battles of Marathon, Thermopylai and Plataiai still had a special lustre attached to them, and their names were enough to stir up patriotic feeling among the Greeks living under Roman rule. This was particularly true of the Messenians' inveterate enemies, the Spartans, who not only boasted of their contribution to the victory (while playing down that of the Athenians) but hammered the message home by means of evocatively named public buildings such as the Persian Stoa in the Agora (Paus. III.11.3), special rites for young men of military age and, above all, by preserving the monuments to the dead of Thermopylai and the Spartan commanders in the Persian Wars, such as admiral Eurybiades (Paus. III.16.6) and the heroes Leonidas and Pausanias (Paus. III.14.1). The Messenians' only answer to all this was to venerate Aristomenes as their national hero, the man who had challenged the Spartans' famous war machine and tarnished their reputation as invincible warriors by repeatedly humiliating them on the battlefield. The tomb and shrine of Aristomenes in the gymnasium and the bronze statue of him seen by Pausanias in the stadium were there to serve as an example to the young men, to remind them of their country's heroic exploits in the past and to reinforce their hostility to the old enemy, Sparta.



### Epameinondas as hero founder

The surviving literary and epigraphical evidence leaves no doubt as to the posthumous heroization and veneration of the Theban general Epameinondas, who founded the new city of Messene (Paus. IX.15.4). Epameinondas's victory at Leuktra in 371 B.C. was of the utmost significance, as it was the first overwhelming



Fig. 27. Rooms in the west wing of the Asklepieion.

defeat of the Spartans since the battle of Hysiai in the Argolid three hundred years earlier, in 669 B.C. It was in fact Kaukon, the legendary founder of the Andanian Mysteries, who foretold the glory and heroization of the Theban general: he appeared to



Fig. 28. The west wing of the Asklepieion from the north.

Epameinondas in a dream, in the guise of a venerable old priest, and said to him, "I shall make your name and your glory live for ever" (Paus. IV. 26.6).

Pausanias, who singles out Leuktra as "the most famous of all recorded victories of Greek over Greek" (IX.6.1, IX.13.4), saw an iron statue of Epameinondas in the sanctuary of Asklepios at Messene (IV.31.10): it must have stood in Room N1 in the west wing (figs 27-28). The presence of a second (bronze) statue of Epameinondas in company with the twelve gods in the Hierothysion at Messene makes it clear that he was venerated not merely as a divine hero and founder of the city but as an equal or near-equal of the Olympian gods: this elevated status would appear to have been accorded to him immediately after his death at the battle of Mantinea in 362 B.C.

Epameinondas's innovations in strategy and tactics were admired by many eminent persons in the ancient world, including Timoleon, Cato, Philopoimen and Hadrian. Philip II of Macedon spent some time in Thebes in his youth, living in the house and under the strict supervision of Epameinondas's protégé Pammenes, and it was presumably there that he received his first lessons in military tactics. Alexander the Great, too, is believed by some historians to have adopted many of Epameinondas's strategies. Lastly, the Argives were proud of having taken an active part in the fortification and settlement of Messene under Epameinondas's leadership; they commemorated the event with a group of bronze statues of mythical Argive kings and heroes by Antiphanes, which they dedicated at Delphi in a semicircular exedra on the right side of the Sacred Way in 368 B.C. The building most likely to have been used for the hero cult of Epameinon-

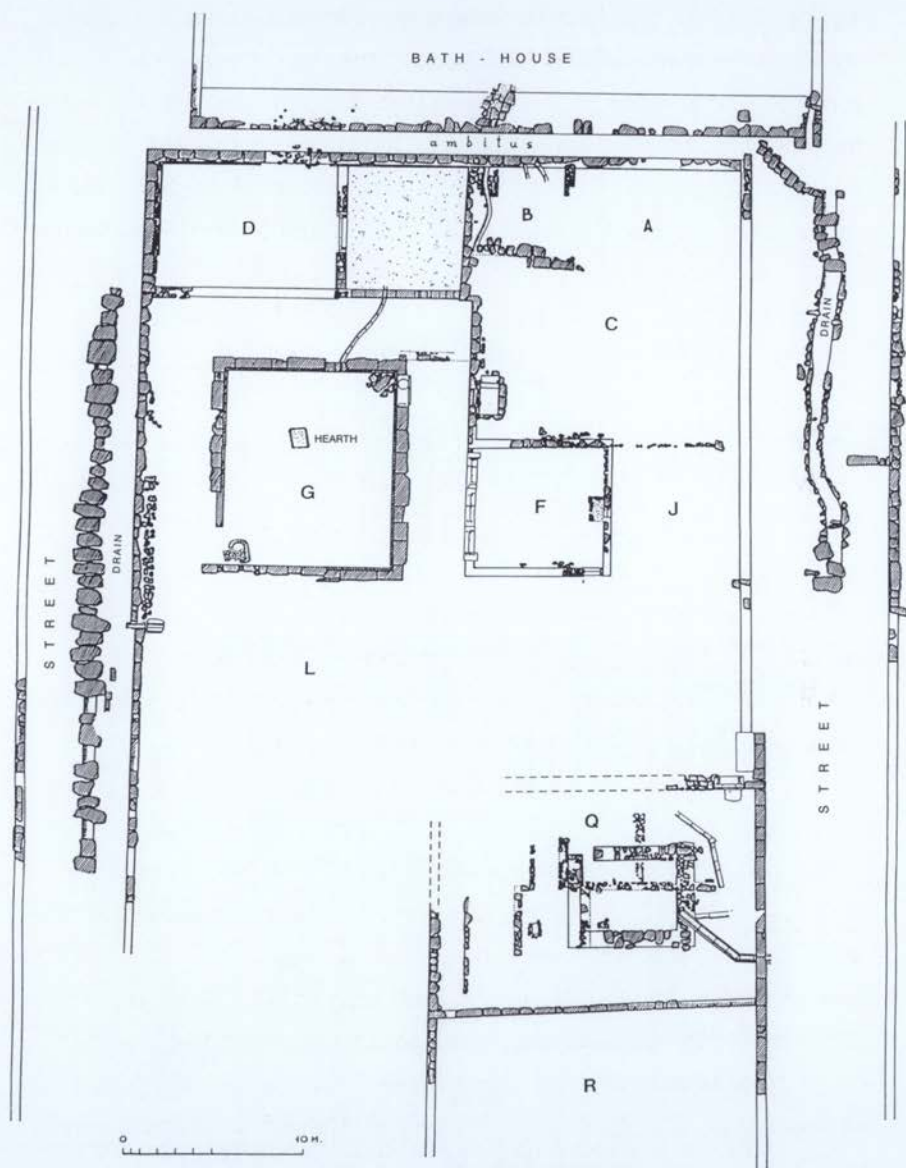


Fig. 29. Ground plan of the probable Hierothysion.

das at Messene was the Hierothysion. A building now being excavated to the south of the Asklepieion may well have been the Hierothysion described by Pausanias (fig. 29), who saw in this building the following votive offerings: a bronze statue of Epameinondas, statues of the twelve gods and “ancient” tripods related to the cult of Zeus Ithomatas and the games held in his honour



Fig. 30. Bronze coin depicting Zeus hurling a thunderbolt, with a tripod beside him. Fig. 31. Stone base for a bronze tripod built into the wall of the Voulkano Monastery church.

(figs 30-31). The bronze statue of Epameinondas would doubtless have represented him as a warrior (fig. 32).

During the Roman period, prominent members of the Messenian aristocracy liked to add the eponym *Novus Epameinondas* to their names. The phenomenon of “genealogical snobbery” (to use Spawforth’s phrase) was by no means rare. In other Greek provincial towns as well as Messene, the local gentry had no scruples about naming themselves after heroes or tracing their descent back to mythical heroes and demigods such as Herakles or the Dioskouroi in order to boost their prestige, not only in their own community but also in the eyes of the Roman aristocracy, who were easily impressed by claims of descent from mythological figures. Although it was so common to find people calling themselves *Novus Epameinondas*, the Messenians held the title in high esteem at least until the first century A.D., on the evidence of an inscription at Olympia in which the emperor Tiberius – on whom the Messenians had pinned all their hopes of support following the death of the “pro-Spartan” Augustus – is honoured by being so called.



Fig. 32. Votive relief representing the hero in a libation scene.

### Theseus and the epebes

Ever since the first statue of the spearman known as the Doryphoros was discovered at Pompeii, there has been uncertainty over the identity of its subject. The same question arises in connection

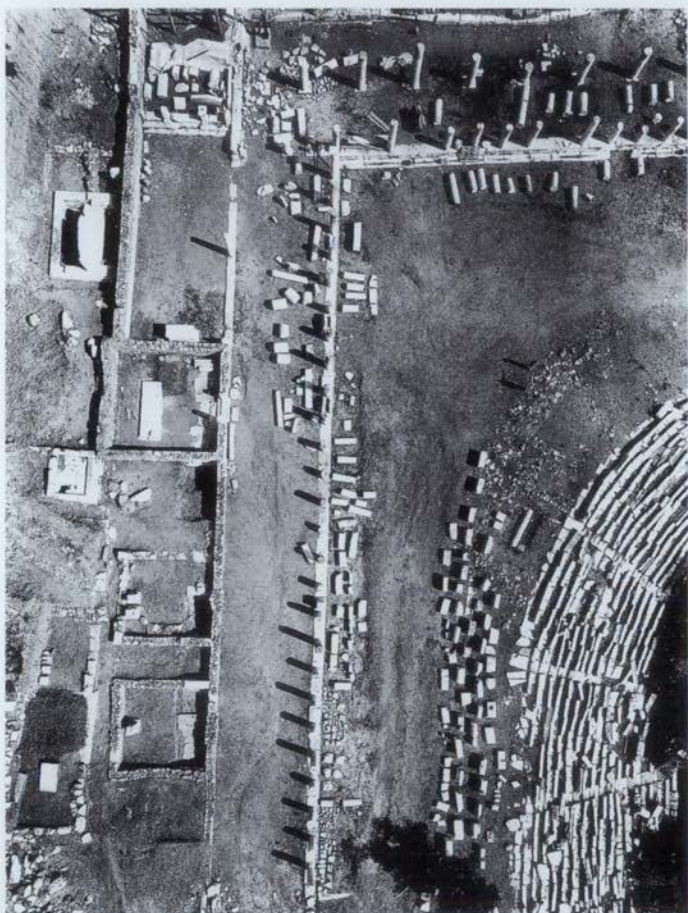


Fig. 33. The west stoa of the Gymnasium at Messene.

with the Doryphoros found at Messene (fig. 33). Certainly the nakedness and larger-than-life size of the figure suggest that it was a demigod or hero rather than a mere mortal Olympic victor (figs 34-38). Early in the twentieth century Friedrich Hauser suggested that it was a statue of Achilles, and his view has been



Fig. 34. The Doryphoros of Messene; the plinth and the feet of the Doryphoros.





Fig. 35. Frontal view of the Doryphoros.



Fig. 36. Left side view of the Doryphoros.



Fig. 37. Back view of the Doryphoros.



Fig. 38. Rear left view of the Doryphoros.

accepted by most scholars since then. Burkhardt Wesenberg recently advanced fresh arguments in support of this identification, but he contends that the statue shows Achilles not on the battlefield but carrying his spear to the funeral games of Patroklos. Werner Gauer argues that the Doryphoros is to be identified as the Argive hero Orestes. Luigi Beschi's view that it was not intended as a representation of any individual, whether god, hero or mortal, but simply as an exemplum of the sculptor's best work

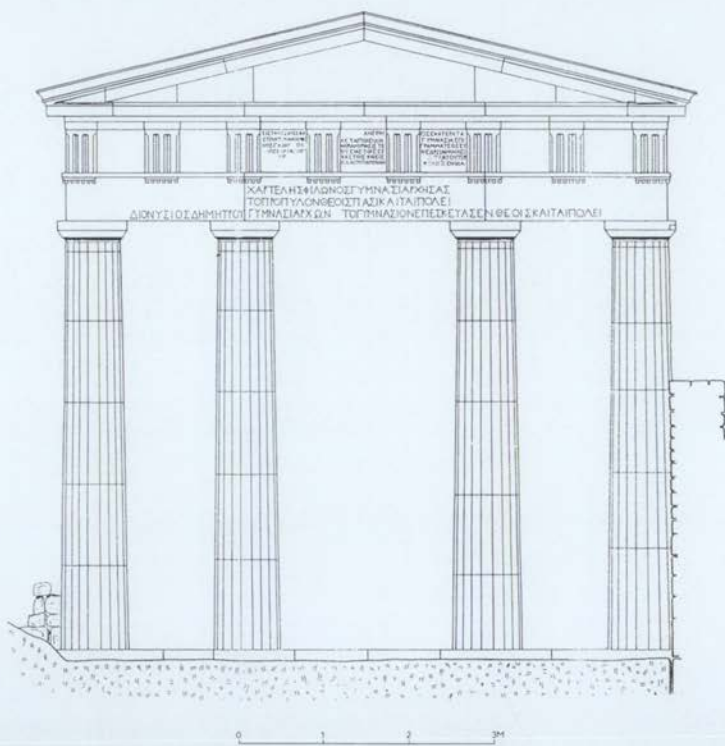


Fig. 39. The four-column propylon of the Gymnasium.

set up outside his workshop in Argos to attract public attention, is not convincing. Nor can I see how, if the *Doryphoros* was indeed an exemplum, it “may have been made by Polykleitos for his personal satisfaction, without a proper commission” as Brunhilde Ridgeway proposes. Paul Zanker believes that the *Doryphoros* from the palaestra at Pompeii was also an exemplum, but one intended to be imitated by athletes rather than sculptors. His interpretation, although correct in my opinion, does nothing to help



Fig. 40. The four-column propylon of the Gymnasium.

solve the problem of identification. No doubt Pausanias saw the statue of Theseus near those of Herakles and Hermes, in the place to which they had been moved after the repairs and alterations to the rooms of the west stoa of the gymnasium, and after the construction of the Doric propylon at the north end of the stoa (figs 39-40).

The slaying of the Minotaur was the outstanding exploit of the Athenian hero-king and was an event of the utmost importance to the Athenians, who venerated him as the saviour of their city, at least from the time of Solon. In the institution of *ephebeia*, as it existed both in Athens and among their old allies the Messenians, the initiatory nature of the "confinement" of young men in the gymnasia (for three years at Messene) and of the other rites of passage is a known fact. Equally well known is Theseus's association with the *ephebes*. His killing of the Minotaur is the labour that most closely connects him with young manhood and rites of passage. The statue of Theseus of the Messene gymnasium, which must necessarily have had some relevance to the *ephebes* who trained there, would presumably have depicted him at the moment of his victory over the Cretan monster: he would have been shown emerging triumphantly from the Labyrinth with his spear over his shoulder. A fresco from Herculaneum, now in Naples (Museo Nazionale, 9049), in which Theseus is seen at the entrance to the Labyrinth after triumphing over the Minotaur, shows him with his left arm bent at the elbow and holding a stick (something between a club and a spear) over his shoulder (fig. 41). The iconography is very close to that of Polykleitos's *Doryphoros* and supports the hypothesis that the Messene *Doryphoros* is to be identified as Theseus.



Fig. 41. Theseus after killing the Minotaur. Wall-painting from Herculaneum, Campania.



### Grave monuments inside the walls

The fact that Grave Monument  $\Delta$  is next to the Asklepieion and communicates with it seems to indicate that it had a functional and conceptual connection with the sanctuary of Messene and Asklepios, while its morphology resembles that of a family grave monument to a heroized mortal (figs 42-43). Excavational evidence, in combination with the structural features of Grave Monument  $\Delta$ , show that it was constructed on its slightly raised terrace at some time after the completion of the Asklepieion buildings (fig. 43). In fact two rooms of the Asklepieion complex had to be demolished to allow the monument to be incorporated into it.



Fig. 42. View to the grave monument  $\Delta$ , from the north-east.

Its east room contains two looted cist graves under the floor. The doorway was in the centre of the south side and led into the middle room, which served as an entrance hall. In 1925 George Oikonomos found a pit under the floor of this central room, which he interpreted as a sacrificial pit. Under the floor of the west room Oikonomos found a second pair of looted graves, hence his use of the term “the building with four graves” (*tetrataphion ktisma*). Since Grave Monument  $\Delta$  contained graves, it follows that it was a family grave monument, similar to those discovered in the gymnasium and to the east of the Asklepieion.

In the peribolos of Grave Monument  $\Delta$  was found the upper part of a limestone Doric column. In 1993 this was reattached to the lower part of the same column, which bears the decrees of

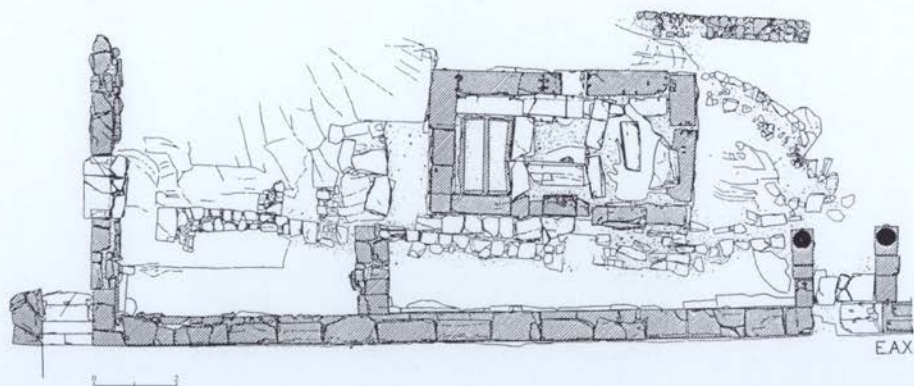


Fig. 43. Plan of Grave Monument  $\Delta$ .

seven cities honouring the sculptor Damophon (figs 44-45). The column tapers upwards and is 3.26 m. high; its twenty shallow fluts end below in a plain band inserted in the circular cavity of the missing base; two dowel holes on its upper surface served for the attachment of the missing Doric capital. The column must have been erected in front of Monument Δ, constructed after the Asklepieion where Damophon had worked. A bronze image of the sculptor himself or some other work of art might have stood on the missing capital of the column.



Fig. 44. The Doric column bearing the decrees in honour of Damophon.

The seven honorific decrees, inscribed on the column after Damophon's death, are copies of the originals, which were issued at different dates. The seven cities that enacted decrees conferring great honour on the distinguished Messenian citizen and sculptor were Lykosoura, Leukas, Kranioi (Cephalonia), Melos, Kythnos, Gerenia and Oiantheia. On the evidence of the citations in these decrees, Damophon was a member of the wealthy landowning

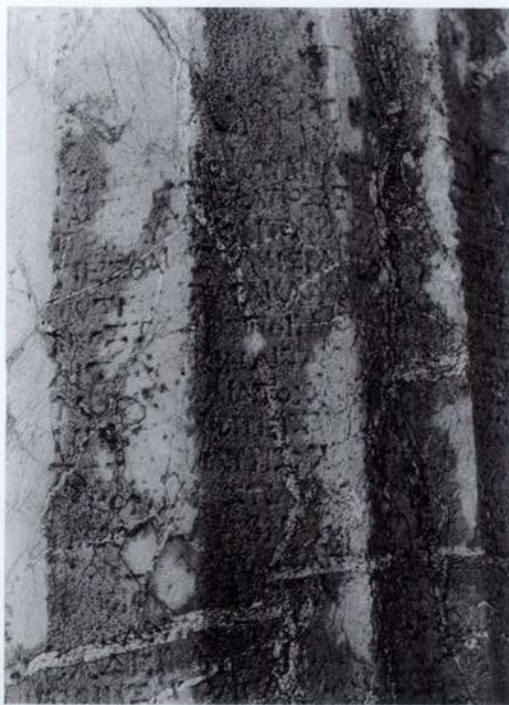


Fig. 45. Detail of the inscribed Doric column.

class, a staunch upholder of the city's traditions, customs and institutions, a devout believer in the gods and a conservative by nature, especially by the standards of his time, which was characterized by widespread loss of faith in established institutions, traditional customs and the gods. Indeed, Messenian society as a whole was conservative and firmly rooted in tradition, as were the exclusively divine and heroic (not mortal) figures depicted in Damophon's sculptures. Two of the best preserved heads of his

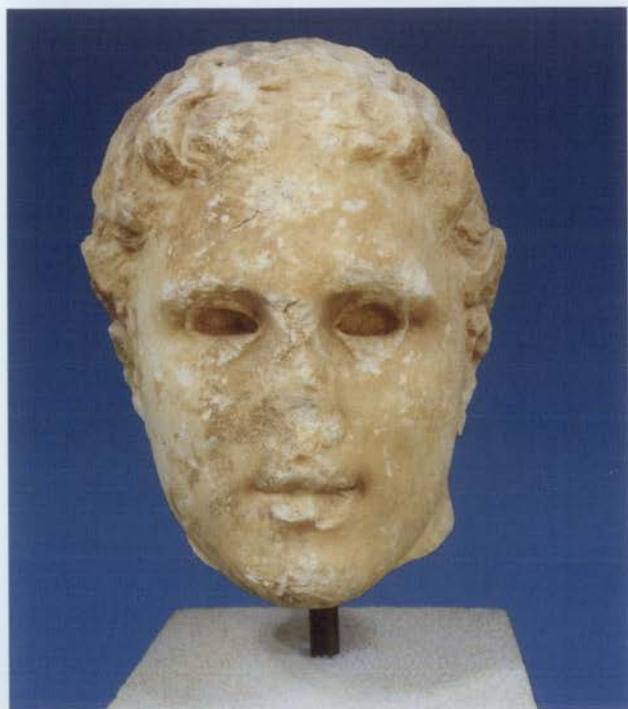


Fig. 46. Head of a marble statue of Apollo by Damophon.

statues from the Messene Asklepieion are those of Apollo and the young Theban Herakles (figs 46-47).

In the worlds of sport and poetry we know of a number of outstanding men – and women too – who were honoured after their death and sometimes became the object of a cult: Homer, Hesiod, Archilochos, Pindar, Sophokles, the poetesses Sappho and Korinna, the girl athlete Chloris-Meliboia and the Olympic horsewoman Kyniska. On the evidence available, Grave Monument Δ

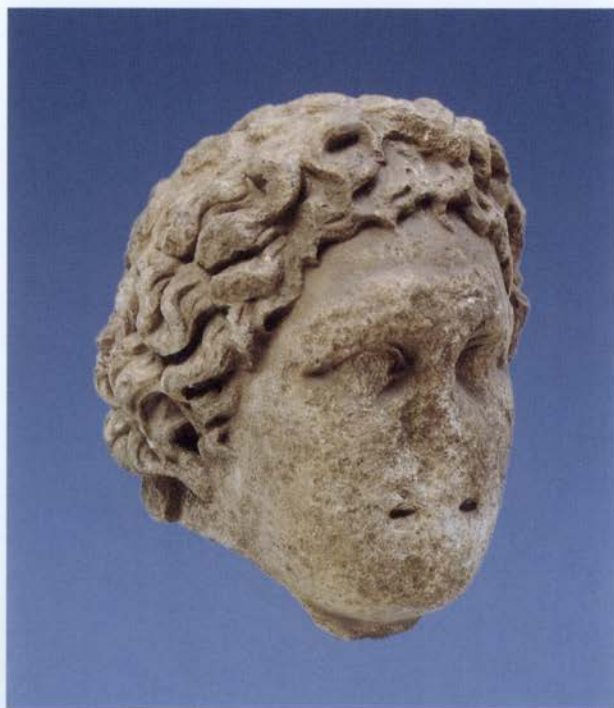


Fig. 47. Head of a marble statue of Herakles by Damophon.

was a family tomb in which the sculptor and members of his immediate family (his wife and probably their two sons Xenophilos and Damophon the younger) were buried. The inference to be drawn from a passage in Pausanias (VIII.31.1-6) is that Damophon also had two daughters, who were sometimes identified with the two flower-picking girls in the cult group of Demeter and Kore Soteira that he made for Megalopolis. Where they might have been buried after their alleged marriage and death remains unknown.

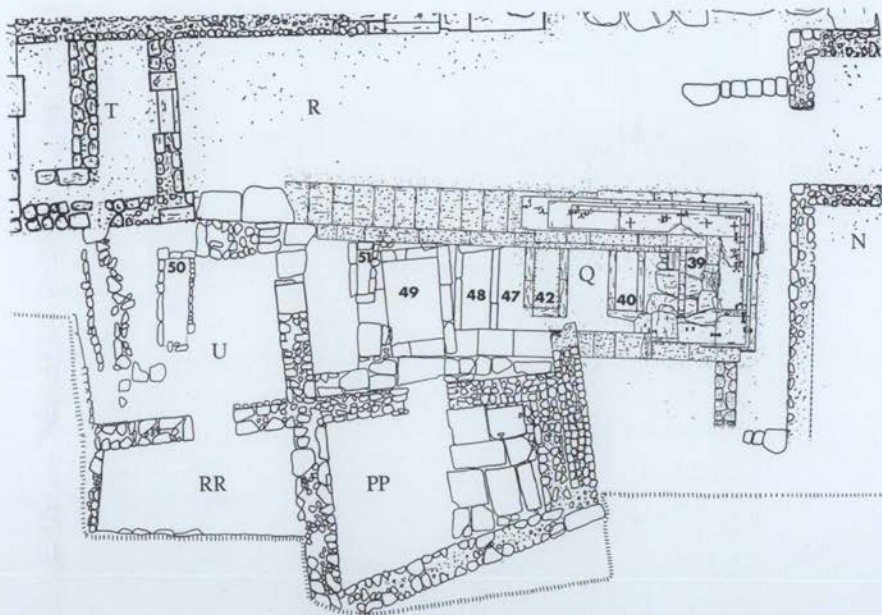


Fig. 48. Plan of a grave monument to the east of the Asklepieion.

Ten dead Messenians (six men and four women), evidently belonging to distinguished local families, had a grave monument erected in their honour *intra muros*, in a very prestigious and conspicuous position facing the entrance of the Asklepieion (figs 48-49). The way the names of the dead are written without patronym and in one line on the crowning stones above the stylobate speaks for the heroic character of their death. The ten names are Neon, Thrasylochos, Antisthenes, Polystratos, Polyandros, Polykrates, Theba, Helxippa, Gorgo and Lyso. They may have been killed on the battlefield, probably either in the battle



Fig. 49. View of the grave monument from the north.



to defend Messene against Demetrios of Pharos in 214 B.C., in which women fought alongside the men, or else during the brief occupation of Messene by Nabis of Sparta in 201 B.C. The offerings found inside the tombs, although some of them had been reused in the Roman period, are compatible with that dating.

The imposing funerary monument of the 1st century B.C., occupying a prominent position overlooking the running-track of



Fig. 50. Podium of the family mausoleum of the Saithidai. West side.

the stadium and built on a high podium attached to the city wall, seems to have belonged to the Saithidai, a family of high standing in the city (fig. 50). The monument was continuously in use from the 1st to the 2nd century A.D. for the inhumation of members of the family, whose genealogical tree has been reconstructed for at least five generations. Pausanias, who visited Messene between A.D. 155 and 160, during the reign of Antoninus Pius, saw this



Fig. 51. *Imago clipeata* (shield image) with the bust of Saithidas I.  
Augustan period.

family's grave heroön in the stadium of Messene and described it briefly (IV.32.2). It is in the form of a temple with four columns at the front, antechamber and cella, measuring  $7.44 \times 11.60$  m. (figs 53-54). A marble sarcophagus of the Antonine period with a reclining male figure on the sofa-like lid was found in fragments inside the cella; an *imago clipeata* (shield image) with a portrait head of Saithidas of the Augustan period was probably placed in the middle of the front pediment (fig. 51). The left part of an excellent head of the Antonine period probably portrays Tiberius Claudius Saithidas Cailianus II, high priest of the Emperors' cult and Helladarch of the province of Achaia (fig. 52).

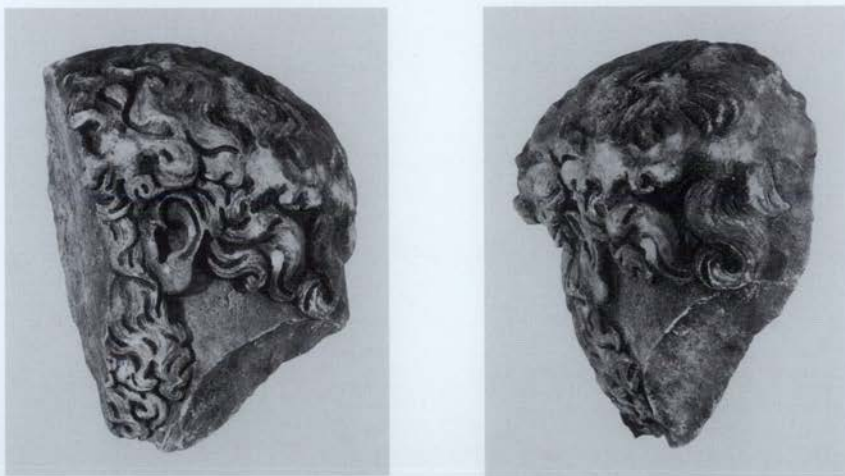
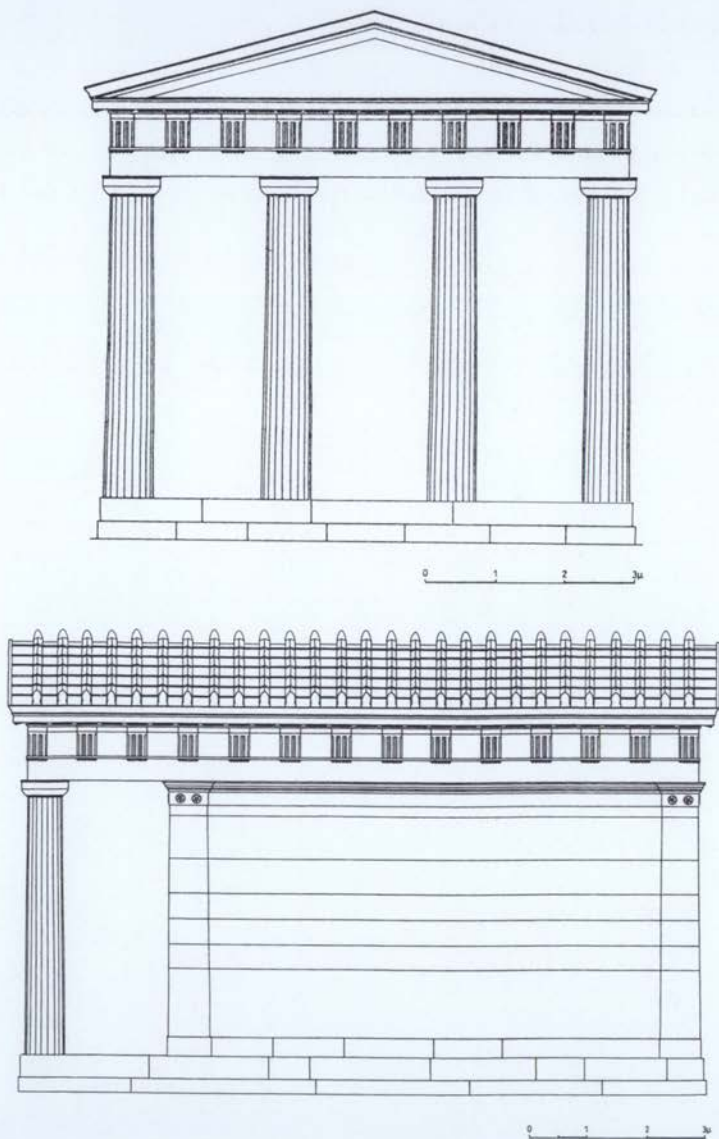


Fig. 52. Head of a marble portrait statue of the Antonine period.



Figs 53-54. Front and side views of the mausoleum of the Saithidai.

### Statues of heroized dead

The statue of Hermes from Room IX of the Messene gymnasium bears a close resemblance to Polykleitos's Doryphoros. Its prototype was probably a bronze statue made by one of the followers of

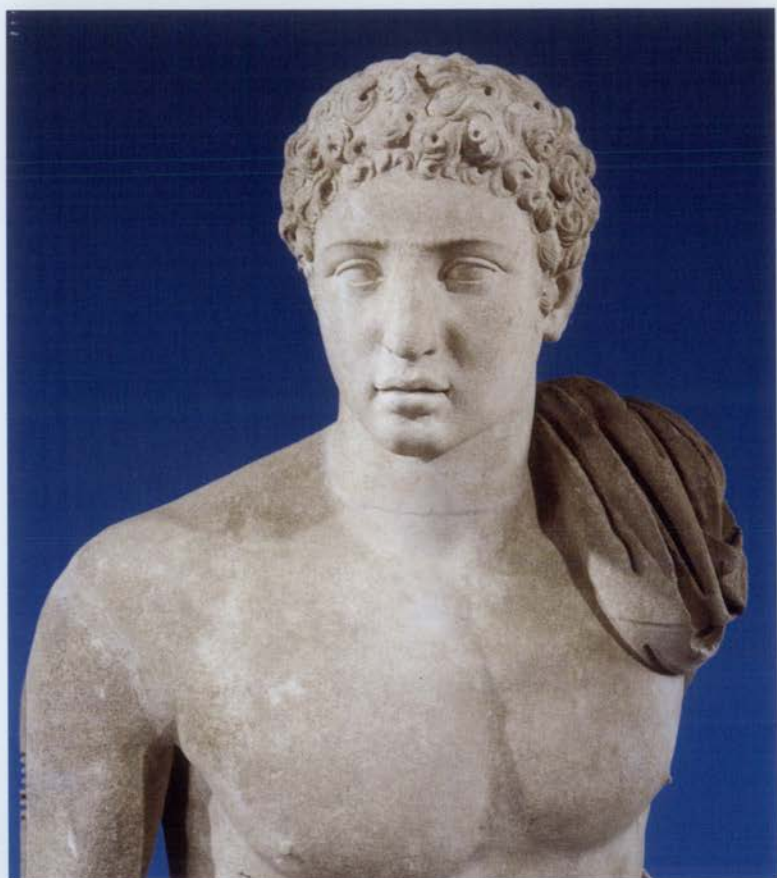


Fig. 55. The statue of Hermes from Messene: the head and upper torso.

the school of Polykleitos (figs 55-58). This hypothesis is reinforced by the fact that the same movement of the back-swinging left arm is to be seen in the marble copy of a statue identified by some scholars as Polykleitos's Herakles. The Messene Hermes shows a close iconographic affinity to the Hermes Psychopompos

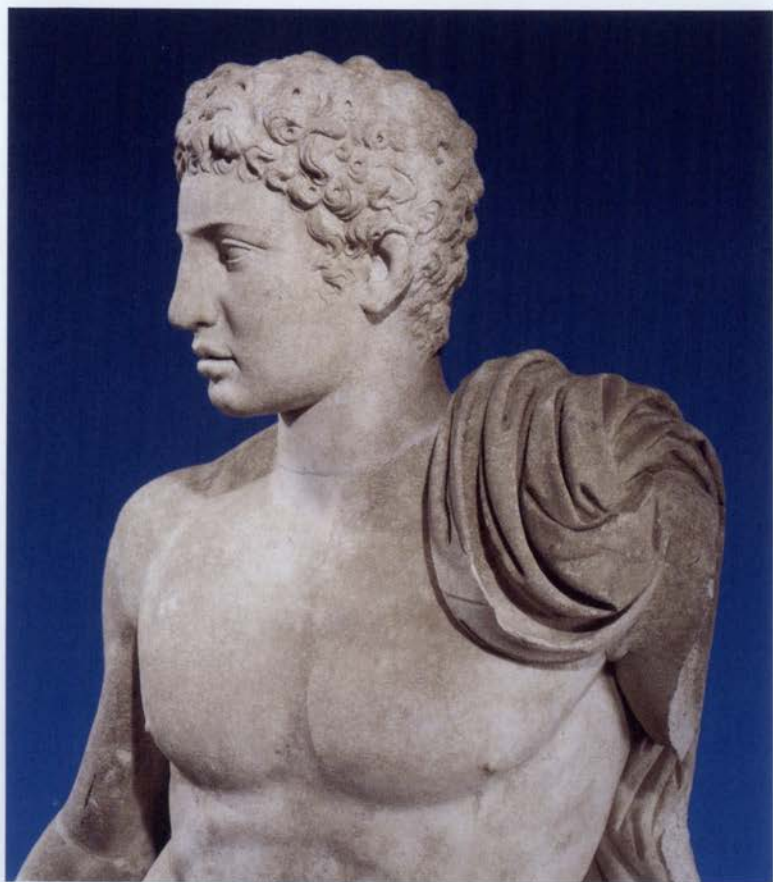


Fig. 56. The statue of Hermes from Messene: the head and upper torso.



Fig. 57. The statue of Hermes from Messene: right side.



Fig. 58. The statue of Hermes from Messene: frontal view.



depicted on a relief column drum from the later Artemision at Ephesos (London, British Museum, 1206) – so close an affinity, in fact, that the relief from Ephesos and the statue from Messene both seem to be derived from the same bronze original, the former being a rather free adaptation while the latter is a copy. As early as 1884, O. Rayet concluded that the Ephesos Hermes was copied from an original by Polykleitos. Other scholars since then have concurred with his view, including Carlo Anti, who has suggested that the original in question was Polykleitos's statue of Herakles.

The larger-than-life size, the nakedness and the idealized features of Hermes make a vivid contrast with the portrait statue of Ti. Claudius Theon Niceratos, wrapped tightly in his himation, which stood next to Hermes in Room IX of the gymnasium's west stoa (fig. 59). Yet both sculptures, the portrait statue of Theon and the idealized representation of Hermes, served a sepulchral function, for they were directly connected with the grave monuments and the heroized mortals buried there. The character of the Messene Hermes is exactly the same as that of the fragmentary second Messene Hermes from Room XI of the gymnasium, which, according to the inscription on its base, was undoubtedly a statue of the dead "hero" Dionysios, son of Aristomenes (figs 60-63). It is also similar in character to the Hermes of Andros (found in 1833 together with a statue of the "Great Herculaneum Woman" in a sepulchral building), the Hermes of Aigion, the Hermes of Thasos and the Hermes of Palatiano (near Kilkis in Macedonia).



Fig. 59. The headless portrait statue of Tiberius Claudius Theon.



Fig. 60. The legs with the plinth and other fragments from the portrait statue of Tiberius Claudius Dionysios Aristomenes.



Fig. 61. Fragment from the left shoulder of the statue of Hermes.

Fig. 62. The right hand of the statue of Hermes.



Figs 63a-b. The torso of the statue of Hermes (Ti. Claudius Dionysios Aristomenes): frontal and side views.

### The gymnasium, the epebes and the monuments

In the Hellenistic period the gymnasia were much-frequented centres of city life where major works of art were exhibited and honorific statues were erected. The area around the buildings was full of marble statues, not only of the gods and heroes who were patrons of youth such as Hermes, Herakles and Theseus, but also of gymnasiarchs, benefactors of the city and eminent scholars, as we learn from the inscribed statue bases found in the gymnasium of Messene. The young were brought into contact with the world of their ancestors, local traditions and the heroes of their country during their education in the gymnasium. The epebes of Salamis played an important part at the annual festivities in honour of their local hero Ajax and the youth of Messene presumably played a similar role in the celebrations in honour of Aristomenes and Theseus. The grave monuments with their posthumous honorific statues, including the mausoleum of the Saithidai, were there for a more serious purpose than merely to indulge the ruling class's vanity and ambition and its desire for ostentation and self-aggrandisement. In reality, heroes and the illustrious dead, through their constant "presence" in the annual celebrations in their honour, were an integral part of the political and social scene. Evidently the annual public proclamation of the heroes and distinguished past citizens buried *intra muros*, and the recitation of the honours conferred on them by the city, was one of the duties that the *agonothetes* had to perform in the stadium at the opening of the games. The games were held on fixed dates as part of the great religious festivals such as the Ithomaia, the Asklepieia and the Rhomaia. This practice of "heroic proclamations" is confirmed by

the Lykosourians' decree in honour of Damophon, where it is laid down in line 40 that the great honours conferred on him were to be publicly proclaimed at the great festivals of Arkadia, the Argolid and Messenia such as the Lykaia, the Nemea and the Ithomaia, even during the sculptor's lifetime.

On the evidence of an inscription of 14 A.D., it was mainly the young people of the city who took part in the festivals of games in honour of gods and heroes. The same inscription also refers to an

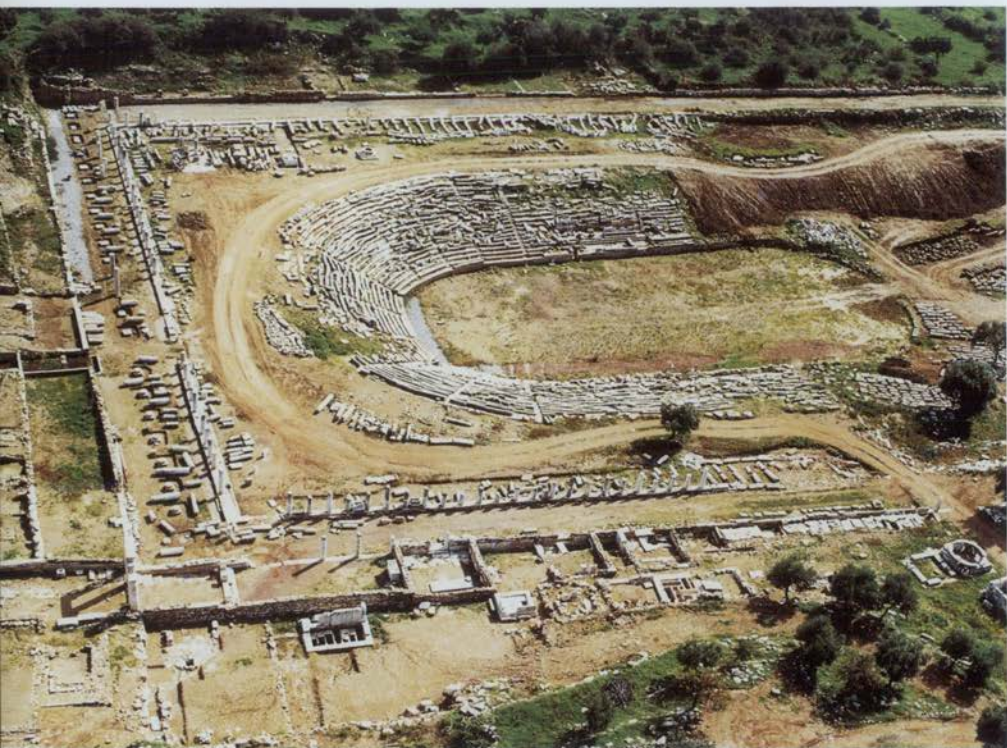


Fig. 64. Aerial view of the Stadium - Gymnasium complex. The grave monuments are in the foreground.

annual festival commemorating the Emperor's birthday, with foot races for boys and adolescents and a horse race for young men; it also refers to the sending of an embassy to Rome to congratulate Tiberius, the new emperor of the whole world.

From the time of Augustus onwards, the Pax Romana marked out Messene as a city of a high social and economic standing. The revival of the ephebic training custom, the production of top-quality statues copied from famous originals of the past like the



Fig. 65. The grave monument K1 behind the west stoa of Gymnasium.



Doryphoros of Polykleitos, Herakles in the type of Caserta and the Hermes erected inside the renovated and reorganized Gymnasium, the construction of the monumental propylon at the north end of the west stoa of the gymnasium and the construction of the mausoleum of the Saithidas family all took place during the Augustan period. Senators like Saithidas in Messene and the last of the Euryclids, the senator Gaius Julius Eurycles Herculanus, seem to have had high "heroic honours" conferred on them posthumously by the citizens of Messene and Sparta. The Spartans had in the past reserved such high distinctions exclusively for their



Fig. 66. A lion attacking a deer and frieze with animals from Grave Monument K1.

kings. Not only senators but also local benefactors of good repute could be granted heroic honours after their death (Paus. III.3.5 and III.15.6).

The existence of a whole series of Hellenistic grave monuments in the Messene gymnasium, all of different architectural design and containing different numbers of burials (K1 with seven bodies, K2 with four, K3 with eight, K6 with ten) is an unusual case, although the existence of mausolea in gymnasia is not unknown in Greece (figs 64, 65). The grave monuments of the Hellenistic period all over the Mediterranean are characterized by great var-



Fig. 67. Grave Monument K2 from the south.

iety, not uniformity of design, despite the fact that all of them served the same funerary purposes. Of all the cities in mainland Greece, Messene has the largest number of grave monuments associated with public buildings within the city walls. Its closest rival, with a similar or even larger number of grave monuments *intra muros*, was Sparta, followed by Megara, another Dorian city; but in those two cities very few of the grave monuments known from literary sources and inscriptions have so far been brought to light. The grave monuments uncovered along the west stoa of the gymnasium were first constructed during the 3rd century B.C. by powerful families of the city. The rectangular II-shaped grave monument K1 (fig. 65) is characterized by a stepped crepis and



Fig. 68. Grave Monument K3.

high orthostates. The missing crowning of the orthostates carried a frieze with reliefs of deers, felines, dogs and griffins running to the right along the front (the east side). Two sculptural groups representing a lion attacking a deer found in front of the monument must have been standing on top of it, above the frieze (fig. 66). The burial chamber, measuring  $4.65 \times 2$  m., was accessible through a stone door at the back, on the west side. Traces of stucco are still preserved on the inner side of the orthostates. Seven cist graves below the floor of the chamber, although plundered, contained offerings including some precious objects. A second, smaller, grave monument (K2) is located a few metres to the south of K1 (fig. 67). It is in the form of an almost rectangular



Fig. 69. Grave Monument K3.

*oikos* resting on a stepped podium. Four cist graves lie under the stone slabs of its floor. Four iron rings on the upper side of the four middle slabs served to lift the slabs for new burials.

The third grave monument, K3 (fig. 68), contains eight cist graves symmetrically arranged around a central small square cist.

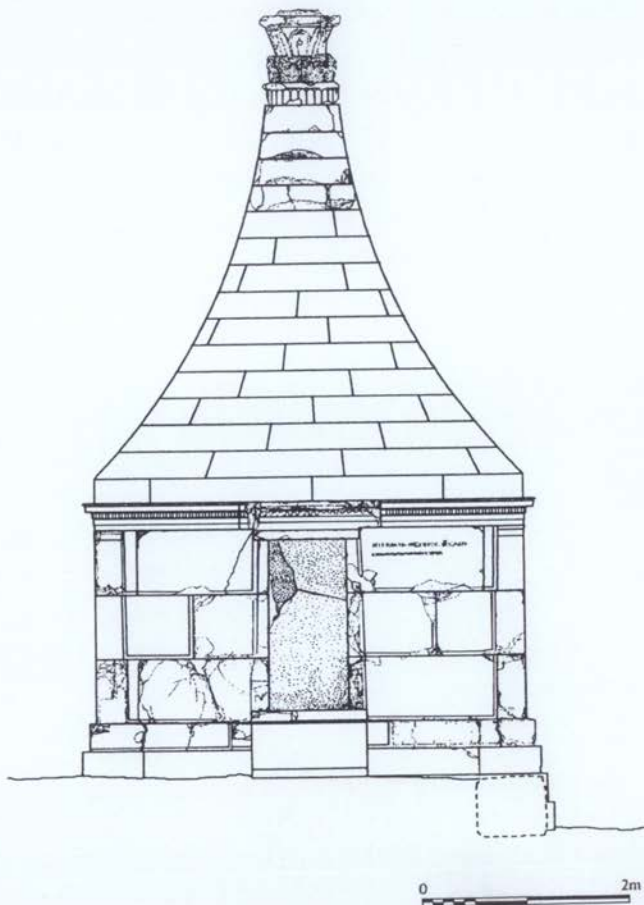


Fig. 70. Grave Monument K3, east side.

Entrance to the monument was through a stone door on the south side. The main grave building is surrounded by a precinct wall of large, roughly-worked stones. Inside the precinct, mostly along the west wall, more than twenty child burials have been uncovered, all interred in large cooking pots. In four cases, dogs were interred

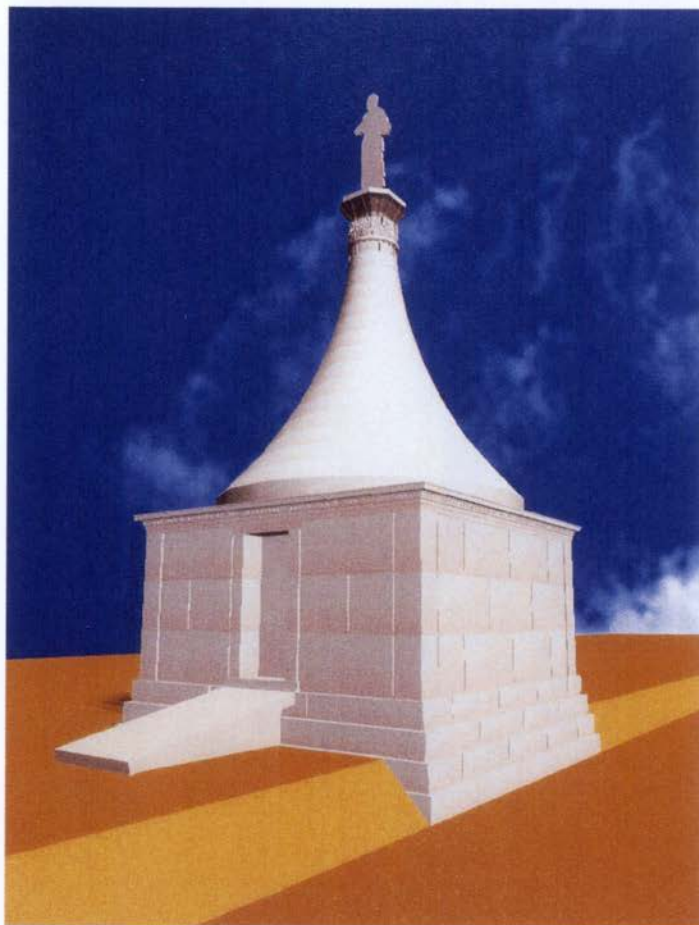


Fig. 71. Grave Monument K3.

beside the child burials. The two hundred or so surviving architectural members of Monument K3 (figs 69-71) indicate that it consisted of a main square chamber, 4.80 × 4.80 m., with a high conical roof terminating in a Corinthian capital, on top of which a bronze vessel or some kind of floral finial must have stood (figs 70-71). This unusual form of grave monument does not occur elsewhere in Greece. Very few comparable examples are to be found, only in the East and Sicily. An Ionic architrave with cornice crowns the upper end of the square chamber on the outside. The names of the eight original dead were inscribed on the architrave of the east side.

[-----] Epikrateia, Nikoxena, Nikich[a],  
[-----]tinos, Agesistratos, Epikrate[s].



Figs 72-73. Stone heads from grave stelae.

The chamber was reused for burials in the Early Roman period (1st c. B.C. - 1st c. A.D.); the names of the dead were then inscribed on the south wall to the right of the entrance: Pleistarchia daughter of Dionysios and wife of Aristomenes, Nikeratos the elder son of Theon, Eisokrateia daughter of Aristoxenos.

Three more grave monuments were brought to light to the south of K3. A grave stele found nearby bears the names of four persons, two men and two women:

Therokrates, Therippidas, Achaiis, Fialina.

The pillar-like stelae terminating in limestone men's or women's heads with roughly-carved features, sometimes grotesque and



Figs 74-75. Stone heads from grave stelae.



seemingly apotropaic, were apparently a kind of local tombstone (figs 72-75). Most of them are crude artifacts that have no parallel elsewhere as regards either their form or their subject matter. The majority of them seem to be associated with specific deceased individuals, on whose graves or grave monuments they are usually found. The problem of their interpretation remains unresolved.

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### **Provenance of the Illustrations**

Photographs: Vassilis Stamatopoulos

Aerial photographs: Ioannis Daskalothanassis.

#### *Plans*

Fig. 2: Theodore Chatzitheodoros.

Fig. 3, 9, 22, 48: Anastasios Papadongonas.

Fig. 29 and 39: Athanassios Nakassis.

Fig. 43: Helen-Anna Chlepa.

Fig. 53-54: Friedrich Cooper.

Fig. 70-71: Juko Ito.



## The Archaeological Society at Athens

When the state of Greece was founded in 1830, after the War of Independence, the first governments were immediately faced with the great problems of the economy, public administration and education. The last of these also included the question of the country's ancient treasures, which had been looted and destroyed over the centuries by traffickers in antiquities. However, the official Antiquities Service was undermanned and incapable of taking proper care of the ancient remains, and so on 6th January 1837, on the initiative of a wealthy merchant named Konstantinos Belios, a group of scholars and politicians founded *The Archaeological Society at Athens* with the objects of locating, re-erecting and restoring the antiquities of Greece.

The Presidents and Secretaries of the Society in its early days were politicians and diplomats, whose enthusiasm was such that in spite of the shortage of funds – for it was financed entirely by members' subscriptions and voluntary donations and received no assistance whatever from the State – they were able to carry out a number of ambitious projects such as the excavation of the Acropolis, the restoration of the Parthenon and excavations of the Theatre of Dionysos, the Odeion of Herodes Atticus and the Tower of the Winds, all in Athens.

Until 1859 the Society was in such a precarious financial position that it was constantly on the verge of collapse. In that year the distinguished scholar and epigraphist Stephanos Kumanudes became its Secretary, and he held the position until 1894. With his expertise, his methodical mind and his energy he breathed new life into the Society, and on his initiative large-scale excavations were carried out in Athens (the Kerameikos, the Acropolis, Hadrian's Library, the Stoa of Attalos, the Theatre of Dionysos, the Roman Agora), elsewhere in Attica (Rhamnous, Thorikos, Marathon, Eleusis, the Amphiaraeion, Piraeus), and in Boeotia (Chaironea, Tanagra, Thespiiai), the Peloponnese (Mycenae, Epidaurus, Lakonia) and the Cyclades. Meanwhile the Society founded several large museums in Athens, which were later amalgamated to form the National Archaeological Museum.

Kumanudes was succeeded by Panayiotis Kavvadias, the General Inspector of Antiquities (1895-1909, 1912-1920), who carried on his predecessor's work with undiminished energy and presided over excavations in other parts of Greece – Thessaly, Epiros, Macedonia and the islands (Euboea, Corfu, Kefallinia, Lesbos, Samos and the Cyclades) – as well as the opening of numerous museums in provincial towns. Kavvadias was succeeded by three university professors, Georgios Oikonomos (1924-1951), Anastasios Orlandos (1951-1979) and Georgios Mylonas (1979-1988). Under them the Society managed to keep up its archaeological activities in spite of the difficulties caused by the Second World War and its aftermath, which hampered its work for a considerable length of time.

As an independent learned society, the Archaeological Society is in a position to assist the State in its work of protecting, improving and studying Greek antiquities. Whenever necessary, it undertakes the management and execution of large projects: this has happened with the excavations in Macedonia and Thrace in recent years and with the large-scale restoration projects in the past.

An important part of the Society's work is its publishing. It brings out three annual titles: *Praktika tes Archaialogikes Hetairias (Proceedings of the Archaeological Society)* (since 1837) containing detailed reports on the excavations and researches carried out in all parts of Greece; the *Archaialogike Ephemeris* (since 1837) containing papers on subjects to do with Greek antiquities, including excavation reports; and *Ergon tes Archaialogikes Hetairias (The Work of the Archaeological Society)* (since 1955), published every May, with brief reports on its excavations. *Mentor* is a quarterly whose contents consist mainly of short articles on ancient Greece and the history of Greek archaeology, as well as news of the Society's activities. All these are edited by the Secretary General.

Besides the periodicals, there is the series of books with the general title *The Archaeological Society at Athens Library*: these are monographs on archaeological subjects and reports on excavations, mostly those carried out by the Society.

The Society is administered by an eleven-member Board, elected every three years by the members in General Meeting. Every year, in May or thereabouts, the Secretary General of the Board reports on the Society's activities over the past twelve months at a Public Meeting.



**ΑΡΧΑΙΟΙ ΤΟΠΟΙ ΚΑΙ ΜΟΥΣΕΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΟΣ\***  
**ANCIENT SITES AND MUSEUMS IN GREECE\*\***

**1. Antonios D. Keramopoulos**

*A Guide to Delphi.*

*Ὁδηγὸς τῶν Δελφῶν.*

*(The Archaeological Society at Athens Library Series No. 26a.)*

1935.

24×14 cms, 143 pp., 98 figs, II folding pls.

(out of print)

**2. Konstantinos Kourouniotes**

*Eleusis: A Guide to the Excavations and the Museum.*

*(in English).*

*(The Archaeological Society at Athens Library Series No. 26β.)*

1936.

20×13 cms, 127 pp., 71 figs, 1 folding pl.

€ 6

**3. Nicolaos M. Kontoleon**

*A Guide to Delos.*

*Ὁδηγὸς τῆς Δήλου.*

*(The Archaeological Society at Athens Library Series No. 29a.)*

1950.

20×14 cms, 185 pp., 1 folding pl.

(out of print)

\* "Όλες οἱ ἐκδόσεις τῆς Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἐταιρείας εἶναι στὰ ἑλληνικά, ἐκτὸς ἐὰν δηλώνεται ἄλλη γλῶσσα.

\*\* Unless otherwise stated, all publications of the Archaeological Society are in Greek.



**4. Spyridon Marinatos***Excavations at Thera I-III, 1967-1969 Seasons.**(in English).**(The Archaeological Society at Athens Library Series No. 178.)*

2nd ed. 1999.

20×14 cms, 6+59+54+68 pp., 88+44+45 figs, B+E+B col. pls, XI+VIII plans.

ISBN 960-7036-80-8.

**4. Spyridon Marinatos***Excavations at Thera IV-V, 1970-1971 Seasons.**(in English).**(The Archaeological Society at Athens Library Series No. 179.)*

2nd ed. 1999.

20×14 cms, 6+54+47 pp., 4+6 figs, H+E col. pls, 126+104 pls, 1+1 plans.

ISBN 960-7036-81-6.

**4. Spyridon Marinatos***Excavations at Thera VI-VII, 1972-1973 Seasons.**(in English).**(The Archaeological Society at Athens Library Series No. 180.)*

2nd ed. 1999.

20×14 cms, 6+61+37 pp., 7+4 figs, 11+L col. pls, 112+66 pls, 7+B plans.

ISBN 960-7036-82-4.

No. 178-179-180 € 37

**5. Nicolaos Platon***Zakros: The New Minoan Palace.**Ζάκρος: Τὸ νέον μινωικὸν ἀνάκτορον.**(The Archaeological Society at Athens Library Series No. 78a.)*

1974.

24×17 cms, 334 pp., 141 figs, 1 folding pl.

(out of print)

**6. Basil Ch. Petrakos***Marathon: An Archaeological Guide.**Μαραθῶν: Ἀρχαιολογικὸς Ὁδηγός.**(The Archaeological Society at Athens Library Series No. 146.)*

1995.

20×14 cms, 198 pp., 108 figs.

ISBN 960-7036-46-8.

€ 6

**7. Basil Ch. Petrakos***Marathon: An Archaeological Guide.**(in English).**(The Archaeological Society at Athens Library Series No. 155.)*

1996.

20×14 cms, 6+107 pp., 108 figs.

ISBN 960-7036-57-3.

€ 6

**8. Alcmene A. Stavrides***The Sculptures at the Museum of Tegea: A Descriptive Catalogue.**Τὰ γλυπτὰ τοῦ Μουσείου Τεγέας: Περιγραφικὸς κατάλογος.**(The Archaeological Society at Athens Library Series No. 156.)*

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