

## FOREWORD

*Petros G. Themelis*

The year 1969, because of the junta, was a crucial period for my native land and for me personally. At the time, I was serving as an epimelete of antiquities for Attica and Euboea as well as preparing to depart for graduate studies in Munich on a two-year educational leave with a fellowship from the German government, when suddenly in July of that year I received an order from the then-Ephor General Spyridon Marinatos to go down in haste to Akovitika (Kalamata) to assume the direction of a rescue excavation. Mechanical diggers belonging to the contracting company E. T. K. A. had destroyed part of an ancient building in the course of their work cutting a flood-control ditch next to the bed of the river Ares. The architectural remains had to be uncovered and protected immediately. In the end, I found myself on my own with an average of 40 workers who had been put at my disposal by the pressing and pressed contracting company, to direct an excavation during a long hot summer, from July 22 to August 27, under pressure from the construction company and the roar of the machines. Happily, I had the good fortune to be supported by three indispensable collaborators whom I called to my side – the experienced excavation foreman Dionysios Androutsakis from Chora of Triphyllia, the ingenious self-taught Messenian “archaeologist, photographer, journalist, historian” Giannis Tavoulareas from Kalamata, and the young architect Isidoros Sempsis, who made plans of the buildings with speed and precision. Dionysios and Giannis are no longer among us, while Isidoros lives and works in Thessaloniki.

The excavation of the sanctuary, carried out at the same time as that of the Early Bronze Age (Early Helladic) megaron which came to light about 200 m further north, proved to be extremely interesting and represented a new point of departure in the history of Messenian archaeology. I had the honour and the pleasure at that time to receive a visit from, among others, the Nestor of prehistoric archaeology Professor Carl Blegen, excavator of the palace at Ano Englianos, and to hear his valuable observations. I informed Professor Spyridon Marinatos without fail of the progress of our investigations.

My departure for Germany after the excavation was completed, the writing of my doctoral dissertation, and my ensuing daily administrative and research work in

Attica, Euboea, and subsequently in Delphi left me no opportunity to proceed to the full study of the excavation's finds and their definitive publication. I was confined to the presentation of excavation reports and a limited number of articles. In consequence, my delight in and immediate and positive response to Moritz Kiderlen's proposal becomes absolutely understandable. This able and dynamic young archaeologist at the University of Freiburg invited me to collaborate with him and an interdisciplinary team on a research project aiming at the complete study of the material from my salvage excavation in 1969 of the sanctuary of Poseidon at Akovitika near Kalamata. Our agreement was finalized very quickly in 2005 and comprised: • the study and publication of the totality of the finds from the sanctuary, which are kept at the Benakeion Archaeological Museum of Kalamata; • redrawing of the architectural remains and checking of the stratigraphy; • a geophysical survey of an area 200 by 300 m around the site in order to ascertain the sanctuary's extent precisely and the presence of any subsidiary structures; • a geological survey around the mouth of the Ares river using a hand-operated coring drill in order to establish, after studying the geological stratigraphy, the limits of the ancient shoreline prior to the river's alluvial depositions.

The sanctuary functioned as a cult centre for seafarers in the coastal zone of the perioikic city of Thouria, located 8 km to the northwest, at the bottom of the fertile valley of Messenia. It seems that the “Pohoidaia” of Thouria, which are mentioned in inscriptions, took place at Akovitika. These games were in honour of Poseidon, the city's principal deity, and included chariot races. In addition, it is very likely that the road linking western Messenia with Laconia through the Taygetos passes touched the sanctuary. The choice of the sanctuary's location is connected with that of the Early Helladic megaron about two thousand years earlier.

Messenia exhibited an impressive flowering throughout the Bronze Age, in the Early (3200–2000 BC), the Middle (2000–1550 BC), as well as the Late Bronze Age, also known as the Mycenaean period (1550–1050 BC). The monumental two-storey Early Helladic “megaron” at Akovitika, the Middle Helladic settlement at Malthi, and the Mycenaean palace “of Nestor” at Ano Englianos con-

stitute the most prominent and best known examples of these three phases of the Bronze Age. The character of Messenia's culture in the Bronze Age was Helladic (Peloponnesian), closely related to the contemporary societies of the Argolid and Laconia. Similarly, Messenia was the recipient of beneficial influences from the South (Minoan Crete) and the East, as well as from the West, namely the Adriatic region. These various influences were due in the main to Messenia's geographic location and the potential for maritime communications, which the harbours of Pylos, Kyparissia, and Pharai offered from time immemorial.

The local traditions concerning the first inhabitants and their kings, which the travel writer Pausanias (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD) presents in detail in his fourth book (the *Messeniaka*) have undoubted historical value. The first organized settlements and first kingdom of Messenia go back to the Early Bronze Age. Messenian genealogies show connections in the first instance with Laconia and the Argolid, and also with Iolkos and Athens up to the period of the Trojan war, the death of Nestor and the so-called "Return of the Heraclidae", also known as the Dorian Invasion. Pylos constituted the most important centre in Messenia in Mycenaean times and functioned as the capital of the entire country. The "country of the Pylia", as it is typified in Homer, is synonymous with the country of the Messenians. For the Iron Age, which begins with the so-called "Return of the Heraclidae" and the rule of the Dorian leader Kresphontes over Messenia, the information we derive from the royal genealogies is important and consonant with the archaeological data. Among other things referred to is the establishment of the worship of Zeus Ithomas on Mount Ithome by the Aipytid Glaukos in the Proto-Geometric/Geometric period (10<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries BC). The first phase of the sanctuary of Poseidon at Akovitika is dated to approximately the same period. There is also evidence for the installation of the worship of the hero physician Machaon, son of Asklepios, at Gerenia, in the region of the modern Messenian Mani near Zarnata, as well as for that of the river god Pamisos.

In the palace of Orsilochos at Messenian Pharai, king Iphitos, son of Eurytos, and Odysseus, the still-young king of Ithaka, met to resolve their differences with an exchange of gifts (*Iliad* 5.546). Intense hostility had arisen between them when men from Messenia had stolen 300 sheep, together with their shepherds, and transported them secretly by ship to their own land (*Odyssey* 21.14-19). At their cordial meeting, which took place through the mediation of Orsilochos, Odysseus presented Iphitos with a sharp sword and a strong spear (*Odyssey* 21.34: ξίφος ὄξυ καὶ ἄλκιμον ἔγχος ἔδωκεν). For his part, Iphitos gifted Odysseus the famous bow with its quiver that he had inherited from his father, the renowned Eury-

tos. The son of prudent Orsilochos was Diokles, the powerful leader of Pharai and master of the fertile region in southeastern Messenia where the shrine of Akovitika in its early phase (12<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) was also located. In western Messenia Gerenian Nestor governed, while the whole of Messenia at the time was subject to the rule of Agamemnon, all-powerful king of Argos and Mycenae. Pharai and Antheia (Thouria) are included among the seven well-built Messenian cities which Agamemnon, leader of the Achaeans, promised to grant to the enraged Achilles (*Iliad* 9.149-153):

ἑπτὰ δὲ οἱ δώσω εὖ ναιομένα πτολιέθρα  
Καρδαμύλην Ἐνόπην τε καὶ Ἴθρην ποιήεσσαν,  
Φηράς τε ζαθέας ἠδ' Ἀνθειαν βαθύλειμον,  
κάλῃν τ' Αἴπειαν καὶ Πήδασον ἀμπελόεσσαν,  
πᾶσαι δ' ἐγγὺς ἄλός, νέαται Πύλου ἡμαθόεντος.

In the megaron of Diokles at Pharai, Odysseus' young son Telemachus and Peisistratos, son of Nestor, were entertained for one night during their journey from Pylos to Menelaus' palace at Sparta, as well as on their return (*Odyssey* 3.487-490, 15.186-188). The tradition recorded in the Homeric epics and repeated by the travel writer Pausanias reveals, among other things, the good relations which the kings of Pharai maintained with the leaders of the states around them and, at the same time, the very important role they played as trusted mediators in the resolution of differences. These differences were connected with disputed border regions and pasture land, and with seizures of livestock and comparable instances of the show of power and imposition of authority on subjects and especially on neighbours. They were typical social phenomena that characterized the aristocratic clans of the Bronze and Iron Ages, as each attempted to prevail over the others and to extend the boundaries of his own state.

Pharai (Homeric Pherai) was also thought to be the ancestral home of the Apharetiadae, Messenia's royal family (Steph. Byz. s.v. Φαράι [Meineke]). There can be no doubt that Pharai's privileged geographic location and fruitful interior during the Bronze Age, to which Thouria succeeded in the Iron Age, made it a significant place of passage and centre of commercial exchange – a fact that is confirmed by the archaeological data.

The product of the relatively brief but intrinsically interdisciplinary research campaign at Akovitika in 2005 is set out in the chapters of the book you now hold, the completion of which is owed mainly to the zeal and effectiveness of Moritz Kiderlen. From this vantage, I also send my warm thanks to my colleague Xenia Arapoyianni, Director of the 28<sup>th</sup> Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities of Messenia, who has facilitated the work of the research team in every way, as much at the archaeological site as well as in the storerooms of the Benakeion Archaeological Museum of Kalamata.