

Sparta and Laconia: From Prehistory to Pre-modern.

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Edited by

W.G. Cavanagh - C. Gallou - M. Georgiadis

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The throne of Apollo at the Amyklaion: old proposals, new perspectives

Angelos Delivorrias

Out of respect for the strict specifications of the International Conference organised to celebrate 100 years of excavations in Laconia by the British School at Athens, I shall compress here what would normally take far longer to discuss, in order not to exceed the limits of time and size. Thus, I remind you briefly that the sanctuary of Apollo Amyklaios, together with the sanctuaries of Athena Chalkioikos and Artemis Orthia, articulated jointly for worship in ancient Sparta in some way akin to the Holy Trinity for Christianity. But this was a trinity whose significance surpassed by far the local religious needs, expressing both the everyday demands of social and political life, and the pressing tensions of the city's historical existence.

Such things have been said time and again, and I shall not tire you by reiterating the familiar testimonies of the sources. I shall, however, insist on the fact that Sparta, the second most important city in the Hellenic world, has had bad luck archaeologically. By this I mean that although her importance can be demonstrated through the erudite dissertations of specialists, this is by no means apparent to today's uninformed visitor, who encounters nothing in his path except Roman ruins or some indeterminate traces from earlier periods. As far as the Amyklaion is concerned, that is the visible remnants on Ayia Kyriaki Hill, even someone conversant with Pausanias has difficulty in forming even a vague picture of its wealth of monuments and the famous throne by Bathyklés, on the problem of which this brief paper focuses.

Avoiding the temptation of an in-depth critical review, I shall simply remind you that Quatremère de Quincy in 1814 and Theodor Pyl in 1852, Ludwig Ruhl in 1854 and Adolf Furtwängler in 1893 each grappled with the problem of the incomprehensible form of the enigmatic throne, offering us imaginative graphic reconstructions. Moreover, these reconstructions and some additional attempts to reconstitute the mythological subjects of the decoration were gathered together conveniently by Ernst Fiechter and, more recently, by Amalia Faustoferri. Last, all the proposed restorations of the monument are characterised by a common denominator, the reduction of Pausanias' descriptions (3. 18. 9–19. 1) to free drawings, the fancifulness of which varies according to the hypothesis of the scholar and the aesthetic preferences of the time

they were made. Noteworthy too is that predominant in all these were the basic idea of the throne and the question of its relationship, which might impose greater or lesser constraints, with the colossal cult effigy (*xoanon*) of the god. These same parameters defined the two alternatives proposed by Fiechter in 1918, which were supported, for the first time, by those architectural members found in the excavations or retrieved from the demolition of the church on top of the hill. Indeed, his detailed measured drawings were to stimulate henceforth every new attempt to restore the monument, since most of its architectural remains were later reused as *spolia* when the church of Ayia Kyriaki was rebuilt, glorifying the inadequate protection of the site.

Fiechter's study — beyond its positive and negative points, which we cannot of course even touch on here, let alone discuss — ended in a conclusion of fundamental significance for every re-examination of the related issues, that the sanctuary of Apollo Amyklaios housed four basic architectural units: the precinct, the circular stepped altar, the tomb of Hyakinthos and the throne with the colossal *xoanon* of the god. However, with the exception of the easily recognisable parts of the altar, all the surviving architectural members were considered essentially as components of the throne. This has confused, ever since, the complex and thorny problem of the monument's reconstruction, to a worrying degree. So Ernst Buschor, for example, in 1927 ended up proposing a form of throne which, instead of having a structure equivalent to an armchair, was rather more analogous to a modern sofa, with the unadmitted assumption that the prototype for the Pergamon altar could be sought in Sparta. Roland Martin continued to advocate views related to Fiechter's until 1976, which led him also to two alternative proposals (notwithstanding my unsuccessful attempts, in the seminars at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, to persuade him otherwise). Today it seems that the idea of a construction structurally similar to the form of a seat once again prevails. Even so, the motivation behind Helmut Prückner's proposed reconstruction in 1992, which takes no account of those findings that can be deduced from the extant material, would seem to be his imagination.

My own efforts to solve the riddles of the throne had focused on a considerable number of new finds as well as on new study of these, during my productive but — with the intervention of the junta — regrettably short service at Sparta. Even then I had come to certain conclusions, which I shall summarise briefly.

1. There must have existed in the sanctuary of Amyklai, apart from the precinct, the tomb of Hyakinthos, the altar and the throne of Apollo, other buildings too, certainly a stoa and very possibly a propylon.
2. In this way the four typologically different groups of sima copings can be explained, which anyway exceed the requirements of a three-storey construction (as the throne appears to have been) by at least one.
3. The surviving part of the foundation with the crepis, statically weak to support its three levels of superstructure, cannot therefore belong to the throne and should probably be attributed to one of the stoas that surrounded it.
4. In accordance with the highly attractive hypothesis that Bathykles laid out of the ensemble of monumental buildings in the sanctuary on the basis of the principle of axial relationships, the centre of the throne should probably be sought along the axis of the altar, which runs parallel to this foundation.
5. Concerning the style of the throne, despite the abundant Ionic details, the extant members of the colonnades are all Doric and belong to two types, with decorated or with plain hypotrachelion (the section where the shaft and the column join) of the capitals and, consequently, analogous epikranitides (frieze) and cornices.
6. The intercolumniation of the first type is now defined with absolute precision, thanks to the correction of the restoration of the cornice with the inscription ΔΑΜΟΚΑΜΟΣ which Fiechter had proposed, thanks to the identification and repair of the missing part.
7. This correction, in conjunction with other observations, now makes imperative a re-examination and redrawing of those architectural members of which measured drawings had been made earlier and which have not been lost in the meantime. The identification of a significant number of members which had escaped the attention of earlier researchers makes this reappraisal even more necessary.
8. I mention, by way of example, a threshold of monumental dimensions, built into the wall of the church of the Prophet Elijah at Sklavochori and roughly sketched by me. This discovery not only solves the problem of the jambs for a doorway already known, but also, in part at least, of the decisively important issue of the

combination of marble and wood in the structure of the throne.

9. This extremely important find, since it can be combined with other similar architectural *spolia* in the church at Sklavochori, confirms the presence of wooden railings/parcloses on the same level of the throne's superstructure as that on which the Doric columns with a plain hypotrachelion on their capitals must have stood.
10. This colonnade, probably composed of a type of half columns, seems to be associated with the famous marble consoles, the number of which has increased thanks also to my contribution. Nonetheless, it remains uncertain whether it belonged to the 'ground-floor' or to the 'first-floor' level, where the projecting armrests of the throne would perhaps have warranted the consoles.
11. The total lack of fragments that could confirm the existence of metopes and triglyphs (given that the extant sections are of later craftsmanship) indicates that the designer of the monument wanted to divest it of those components that referred directly to the logic of architecture, in order to enhance the impression of a piece of furniture. The same applies to the possible presence of one or more friezes.
12. And so we reach the burning question of the representations that Pausanias describes. We cannot propose that these were marble or bronze reliefs, or painted terracotta plaques, because if they had been in any of these materials at least some fragment would have survived and would have been identified in the course of the exhaustive search to which so much time and brain power has been devoted.

To cut a long story short, I believe that we have to perceive the mythological subjects of the decoration as painted on wooden pinakes, articulated with the rest of the wooden elements of this totally unorthodox architectural creation.

These and other problems will be re-examined, and perhaps even resolved, in the course of an ambitious research project that begins this year, under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and with the active support of the 5th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, with the invaluable input of the architectural genius of Manolis Korres and, I am absolutely sure, with the assistance of all my old and good friends in Sparta.

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