

### The Kalaureia Excavation Project



The earliest excavations in the Poseidon sanctuary on Kalaureia, the northernmost island of Poros, took place in 1894. Two Swedish archaeologists, Samuel (Sam) Wide and Lennart Kjellberg, for two and a half months, investigated the site and then published their results in the journal (*Athenische Mitteilungen*) of the German Archaeological Institute in Athens. They worked on a permit through that institute, as there was no Swedish archaeological school at the time.

The Swedish Institute at Athens was inaugurated in 1948. Since the first, and until 1997 the only, excavation in the sanctuary was done by Swedish archaeologist, the Swedish Institute at Athens was invited in 1996, by the 2nd Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities to resume excavations. At the time I was the Director of the said institute and I did not hesitate to accept the invitation.

We began our investigations in 1997, but as funding was scarce for several years, much of our work consisted of cleaning the site and clearing it of accumulated debris. However, we explored

a small area west of the temple area (i.e. west of the pin-trees) and then decided systematically to excavate building by building starting in the southwest with Building D, the reason being that Wide and Kjellberg tell us next to nothing about this building and it is the building most visible from the modern road. As of 2003, and for three consecutive years a research program was put together, which received funding from The National Bank of Sweden Tercentenary fund, which is a government foundation for research into the Humanities and Social Sciences.

### ***How do we obtain permission to excavate?***

The Greek Law of Antiquities permits the foreign schools to do research in Greece, including archaeological fieldwork. Thus in November of every year we send an application to The Ministry of Culture describing where we would like to excavate, what our aims are and for how long (at the most six weeks/year). We also give a list of the members of the team and a budget for the work. If and when a permit is issued, it details what we can do under the supervision of the local archaeological authorities (in this case the now 26th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities at Piraeus).

Every day, after excavation, all archaeological material is transferred to the local Museum of Poros and this transfer is accompanied by a guard, who is present at the excavation all day. The excavated material is then stored in the museum, which is where scholars can process the material, which entails washing, conservation, study, photography and drawing. If, for some reason, material must be studied at some specific laboratory, a special permit must be obtained from the Ministry of Culture to transfer the object to a laboratory, from where it then must return to the Poros Museum.

### ***The history of the sanctuary to Poseidon, as we understand it so far***

The earliest sanctuary goes back to c. 750 BC. We have found the remains of a small building,

with which can be associated pottery from very large decorated vessels, which were undoubtedly brought to the place by the elite in society. They came to eat and drink together with the god and then they left the remains, including the pottery, of the meals in the sanctuary.

The ground in the sanctuary slopes towards the south and southwest and in the Archaic period (c.700 – 500 BC) large terraces were built in that direction presumably to house more buildings and more people. These terraces are very visible today, as they are well built and their outer faces worked to create nice facades. During the excavation we have discovered that some of the earlier walls were dismantled, when new ones were built, perhaps to reuse the blocks anew.



Towards the end of the 6th century the temple to Poseidon was built in the northeast. It was encircled by a wall, which is still partly preserved. We know from old photographs that it was once higher. Within this peribolos wall is the temple area. However, not a single block of the temple remains in its original place and very few blocks lie about on the surface. We know that the whole sanctuary was used as a quarry for centuries. People came here to collect finished blocks instead of searching for building material farther away. A British traveler, Richard Chandler, describes in his book on his travels in Greece how he, in the 1760s, rode his donkey up to the sanctuary from the monastery, which had been built about three decades earlier. In the sanctuary he found stone masons cutting up the ancient blocks into smaller pieces, loading them onto donkeys to carry them down to the harbor. There ships waited to transport the stone to Hydra for the building of the monastery.

The second half of the fourth century BC was another important period in the history of the

sanctuary. Two buildings were erected in the southern part, of the area. Today one of these is very conspicuous from the road with its thick walls of large boulders. This structure was erected at the very end of the fourth century BC (probably close to 300) and we now know that it had at least two large rooms for dining. The most important aspect of any cult was the sacrifice and this was followed by a feast, where the meat or other food stuffs sacrificed were eaten by the community.

After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC followed a period of upheaval. Many had to flee their home cities and find refuge somewhere else. Sanctuaries in general could become places of refuge and we may imagine many of them filling up with people seeking asylum. The orator Demosthenes came to Kalaureia, where the Macedonian general Archias followed him and tried to convince him to return to Athens. Demosthenes made as if he would do so and got permission to go into the temple. There he took poison and when he felt he was close to dying he walked out of the temple and fell down dead, as he passed the altar. A cult was initiated to him, which also spread to Athens after the Macedonians left the city at the beginning of the third century BC.

West of Building D, within a triangular enclosure, we have excavated a deposit of the remains after a huge meal, which took place some time in the first half of the second century BC. The deposit contained c. 20 000 fragments of broken pottery (none possible to mend), some 2 000 fragments of bone of cattle, goat, sheep and pig but also of both small and large fish. As these bones are not weathered, nor are they gnawed by animals, they must have been covered over almost immediately after deposition. We do not know what kind of meal it was, but the crowd participating must have been very large to judge from the sheer number of drinking vessels. Perhaps these people gathered to celebrate some political event, perhaps a large gift to the gods sacrificed to in the sanctuary. We know that not only Poseidon had a cult here but also Zeus Soter, Artemis, Aphrodite and possibly more deities.

You can read more in English about our project on the web: [www.sia.gr/kalaureia](http://www.sia.gr/kalaureia)

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