

Acheloos' Homeland.

New Historical-Archaeological Research on the Ancient Polis Stratos*

In memoriam Friedrich Sauerwein († 5th Oct. 1997)

Peter Funke

The northwestern Greek regions Aitolia and Akarnania are among the least studied areas, archeologically and historically, in Greece. Only recently have these areas which in antiquity too (at least up until Hellenistic time) lay in the lee of historical events, found attention in scholarly study of the ancient past.² This circumstance is due not least to the fact that the

western parts of central Greece, until only a few years ago, lay outside of all important transportation networks, and were opened to modern vehicular traffic only with great difficulty.

It is for this reason also that only a few of the explorers and topographers who travelled Greece in every direction in the past centuries reached this area,³ even though it abounds in ancient monumental remains. The most important archaeological-historical survey of this area remains that of the English traveler William Martin Leake who, at the beginning of the 19th century, made an extraordinarily precise and still essential inventory of the most important find spots.⁴ A few decades later the French scholar Léon Heuzey travelled the region and published his studies on Akarnania. Together with Leake's works, and those of a few other scholars such as Henri Bazin, Eugen Oberhammer and William Woodhouse, these laid the foundation for all further investigations.⁵

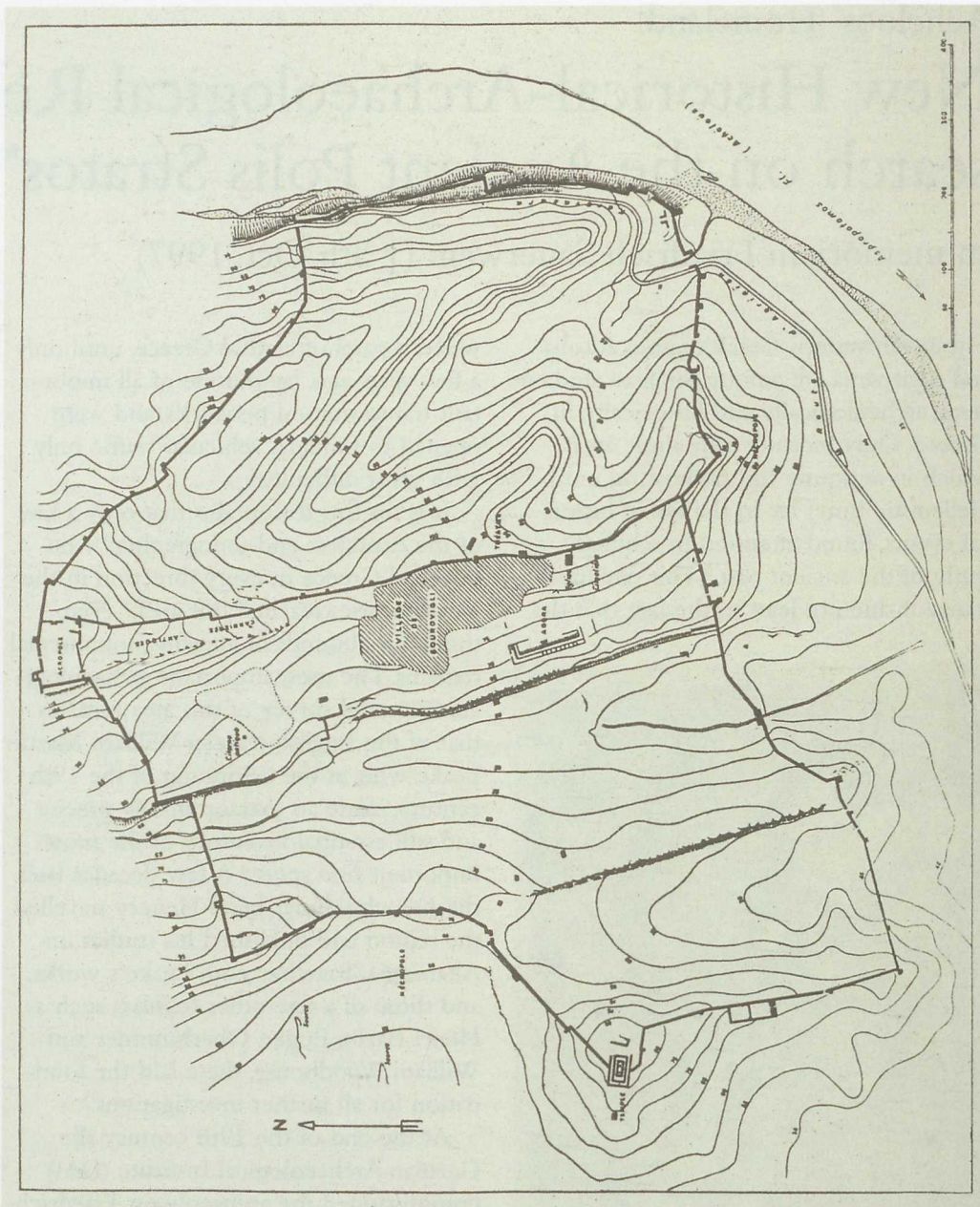
At the end of the 19th century the German Archaeological Institute (DAI) commissioned the archaeologist Friedrich Noack to take a complete archaeological and topographical inventory of all ancient sites and fortifications in Northwestern Greece. In an extraordinarily short time he drew up extensive maps and plans. But he was able to publish his results only in two preliminary reports.⁶

More than twenty years ago now, Lazaros Kolonas, the director of the 6th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, which is responsible for this area, beginning with Noack's results, initiated a research programme which aimed at a systematic recording of all ancient urban sites of Akarnania and Aitolia. It was his inten-

Fig. 1. Ancient cities in Akarnania (E.-L. Schwandner).



Fig. 2. Stratos. Plan of the Ancient city (Courby & Picard 1924, fig. 58).



tion to get a clearer picture of the history of human settlement and a better insight into the historical development of this area. Such a recording is all the more urgently needed as the archaeological remains are irrevocably destroyed by the building of new roads and reservoirs, as well as by intensive agricultural exploitation and a growing urban development of the area.

On the map (Fig. 1) the most important ancient sites in Akarnania known today are marked. They are among the best preserved in all of Greece. To the present

day none of these sites has been completely explored; often Noack's plans⁷ are still the only working basis. During the last decade, archaeological research has concentrated on the ancient harbour city, Oiniadai,⁸ and the city of Stratos. Investigations in the West-Akarnanian peninsula Plagia⁹ with the ancient city Palairos in its centre are to follow in the coming years.

The research work in and around Stratos will be the main topic of what follows here. At the end of the eighties Lazaros Kolonas had decided to start a systematic



Fig. 3. Stratos. Temple of Zeus.

excavation of this important ancient city which was the centre of the Akarnanian League until Stratos was integrated into the Aitolian League in the middle of the 3rd century. The construction of a new dam immediately east of the ancient city wall of Stratos, which turned the Acheloos to a gigantic lake of more than 6 kilometres in length, brought about momentous changes in the whole landscape that made a rescue excavation indispensable. And so the research work in Stratos, that had been started in 1892 and continued between 1910 and 1921 (with some interruptions due to the war) by French archaeologists, was taken up again in some parts of the ancient city.¹⁰ The new excavations were carried out by the 6th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities in cooperation with Ernst-Ludwig Schwandner, the director of the Department of Architecture of the German Archaeological Institute (DAI).

In 1990 the plan was developed to investigate the entire territory of ancient Stratos, the so-called Stratiké, by a systematic field survey at the same time as and in close relationship with the excavations. I undertook this task together with Hans-Joachim Gehrke, my colleague from Freiburg, in a Greek-German *synergasia*. Constant cooperation with colleagues from the fields of archaeology and architectural history (Lazaros Kolonas, Franziska Lang, Ernst-Ludwig Schwandner), geography (Friedrich Sauerwein (†)), palynology (Eberhard Grüger) and geophysics (Norbert Blindow) offered us a singular opportunity to draw a more accurate picture of the history of human settlement in a Greek area that up to now has hardly been known. The period of Greco-Roman antiquity was the focus of our interest, but we also looked at previous eras as well as post-antique times through the present. The following overview, however,

will only deal with the ancient human settlement history at Stratos.¹¹ First of all, a draft sketch of the excavations of the Ephorate in the ancient municipal area will be offered; after that the most important finds and the first results of the survey in the hinterland of Stratos will be presented.

During the 19th century, the members of a Vlachic pastoral clan were settled in the village of Sourovigli within the ancient city-site.¹² As initial plans for a new archaeological excavation were made in the nineteen sixties the inhabitants were displaced and moved to a new village bordering on the south of the ancient city wall. In that way the built-up area the French archaeologists had not been able to explore was accessible too. After the beginning of the excavations had been delayed again and again, they were finally started at the end of the eighties under the vigorous direction of Lazaros Kolonas. The focus of the following campaigns was on the public area of the city, the agora and the theatre; besides these, the fortifications including the acropolis and the temple of Zeus were also investigated.

Surrounded by a, in most parts, well-preserved city wall with a total length of nearly 8 kilometres, Stratos is among the largest urban sites of Northwestern Greece.¹³ In the course of several survey campaigns the mapping of the city wall, that had been carried out at the beginning of the 20th century by Friedrich Noack¹⁴ and then again by French archaeologists (Fig. 2), was totally revised.¹⁵ The integration of the separately secured acropolis into the city walls as well as the situation at the entry of the South gate could be determined. The temple of Zeus is situated in an extremely eccentric location immediately abutting the city wall, which here extends far to the west. Architectural investigations at the temple led to the surprising conclusion that the present unfinished building, which it was believed had been newly constructed in the last third of the 4th century BC, had in fact been erected on the foundations of a previous building

from the 5th century BC.¹⁶ While the city wall also dates back to the 5th century BC the exact dating of the erection of the diateichisma, which separates the eastern part of the municipal area from the western, can not as yet be defined more precisely. An inscription that had been used in the construction of the diateichisma gives us the 4th / 3rd century BC as a vague terminus post quem. Yet that does not definitely answer the questions of when and why the municipal area was reduced. Whether this event can be linked with the Aitolian capture of the city and its integration into the Aitolian League in the middle of the 3rd century BC is in my opinion more than questionable. The reduction of the municipal area is more likely to be connected with the Roman conquest and the loss of political freedom between 168 and 146 B.C. or even to the shifts of population due to the founding of Nikopolis and the Roman colony Patras in Augustan times.¹⁷

The area of the ancient agora had already been located by Léon Heuzey in the 19th century and had been defined more closely during the French excavations.¹⁸ As the main part of the ancient agora had been built over with the houses of the Vlachic village, however, the excavations could take place only on a relatively small area. Here, a stoa about a hundred metres long extending from north to south and an exhedra constructed in a central position in front of it had been laid uncovered.¹⁹ When the old construction strata were uncovered again at the beginning of the new excavations in 1989 the foundations of an, until then, unknown fountain-house were discovered. It bordered on the stoa to the south and marked the southern entrance of the agora. In the area directly in front of the stoa, however, many new finds could also be brought to light. Around the exhedra many foundations and bases were found, but without inscriptions, on which votive offerings and honorary monuments might have stood. Especially remarkable is a small altar of which not only the foundation blocks but also a stone with an iron ring to tether the sacrificial animals re-

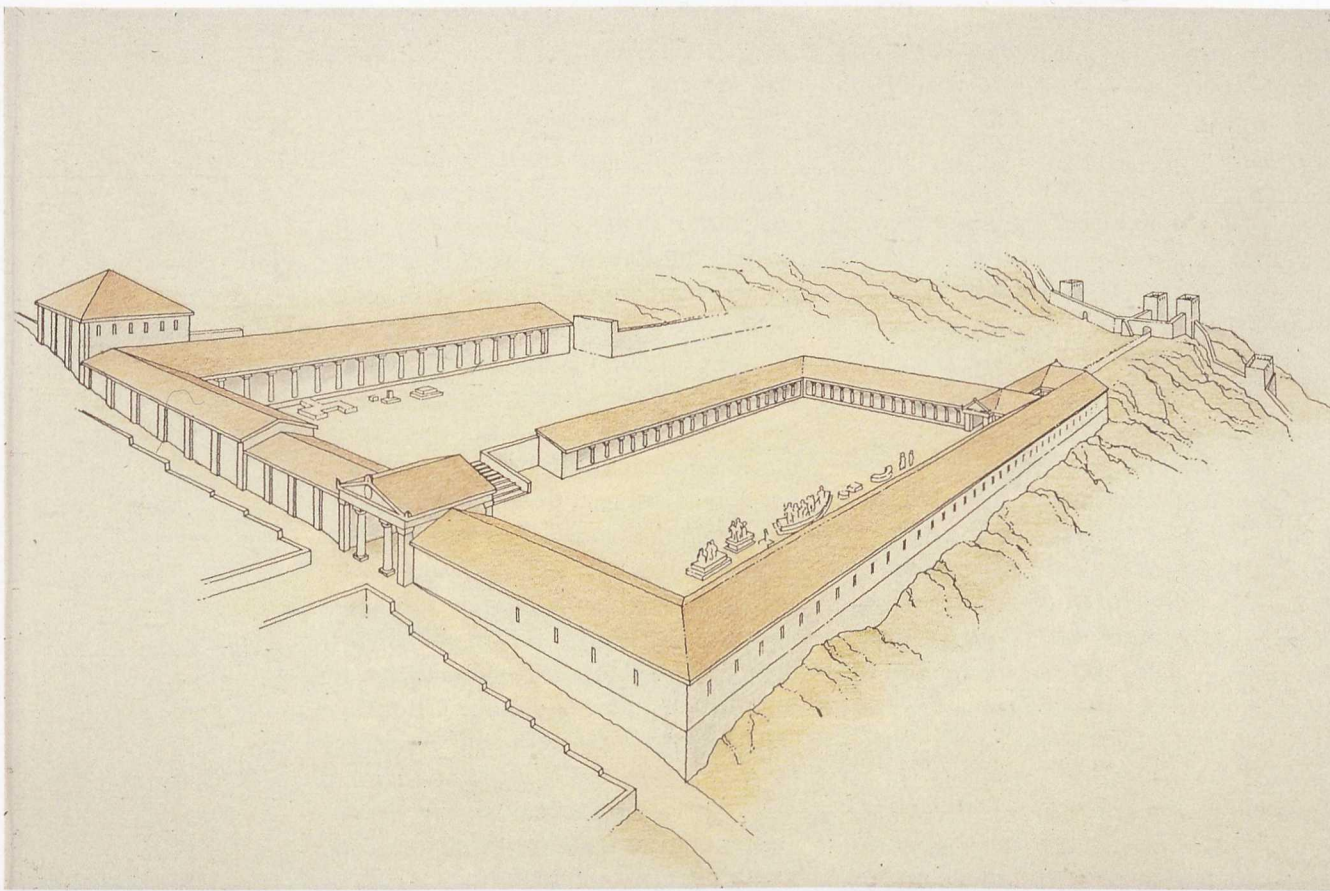


Fig. 4. Stratos. Sketch model of the agora (1995, drawing by E.-L. Schwandner).

main. Because of the small finds – especially oil lamps – this altar is dated to the time between the 2nd and the 4th century AD. Apart from some coin and pottery finds, it is the only evidence from Roman imperial times that has been found within the city walls of Stratos until now. Because of this fact, it is an important link to isochronic finds of the survey campaigns outside the city.

Because of the location of the stoa that had been uncovered by the French archaeologists, it could already be guessed that this hall had been the western boundary of the agora. This assumption was confirmed by the new, Greek excavations, which could be extended over a vast area after part of the old Vlachic village had been pulled down. In this area which rises relatively steeply to the East an open space laid out on astonishingly vast dimensions was brought to light during the past ten years. The area of the agora was enclosed by stoas on all four sides, and was divided into two places by a columned hall in the

middle, parallel to the western and the eastern stoas. The open space on the eastern side was constructed on a ground level some metres higher. In the northeastern corner, immediately adjacent to the east stoa, a further building was built into the steep slope. Because of its architectural form, it is probably a bouleuterion. The sketch model of the agora (Fig. 4) offers an impression of the whole layout, even if some details must now be revised based on recent investigations. As far as we know now the buildings of the agora were constructed mainly during the last third of the 4th century BC. They are, therefore, impressive evidence of the architectural and town-planning achievements in a region whose importance is undervalued all too often.

Travellers in the nineteenth century already assumed that the theatre of the city might lie in a valley basin east of the agora. A corresponding belief is also noted in the French excavation report.²⁰ Excava-

tions in this area, however, could only be carried out after the inhabitants of the old village had been resettled. After a promising trial excavation in 1991 the whole theatre area was excavated during the following years. Under a layer of earth, in some places more than 4 metres thick, generally very well preserved remains of an orchestra, of a stage-building, flanked by two ramps and of the cavea with a complete prohedria were found (Fig. 5). The theatre shows three construction phases: the first belongs still to the last third of the 4th century, the other two to the 3rd century BC. After the final publication of the excavation results, the exact determination of the chronological sequence of the reconstructions, especially of the stage-building will offer important information about the development of the Greek theatre and also about staging practices in early Hellenistic times.

After this short outline of the recent excavations within the ancient municipal area, some preliminary results of the field research that was carried out simultaneous to these excavations in the Stratiké, the territory of the polis Stratos outside its city walls, will now be presented. The close cooperation with the excavators was an extremely important prerequisite for a successful survey. Only by a constant comparison with the finds of the excavation within the city was it possible to classify the surface finds of the survey in a chronological pattern, and thus draw conclusions as to the date of these finds. The data of the excavation in the city provided the missing stratigraphy for the surface survey.

The determination of the survey area was based on the geographical and geomorphological conditions of the landscape, which probably had defined the territory of the polis Stratos already in antiquity. The river-bed of the Acheloos and the lake Ozeros formed the natural limits to the East and the South, whereas in the North and the West the watersheds and passes of the southern and, respectively, eastern foothills of the Pindos mountains

and the Akarnanian mountains delimited the survey region, which covered a total area of about 100 square kilometers.²¹

In order to eliminate all random results the so-called method of a intensive "Raster-survey" was used to prospect the area. Not only were single selected zones investigated, but the whole surface of the survey area was inspected by small groups, usually 3 - 4 of "walkers" under the direction of a leader responsible for organisation and documentation. Franziska Lang has described the methods of the recording and evaluation of the data in detail in her contribution so that a closer description can be dispensed with here.²² A total of 215 find spots and more than 40.000 significant single finds (mainly tiles and pottery) have been collected and documented. The chronological range extends from late neolithic age to the Ottoman era. More than half of the discovery places (133) date from the Classical and Hellenistic as well as the Roman periods. Another focal point is the middle Byzantine period with 65 find spots.²³

There are rather few and disparate prehistoric finds. They start with the late Neolithic/early Helladic age, increase somewhat during middle Helladic times and decline significantly in the late Helladic period. Within the boundaries of Spathari 4 kilometers east of Stratos a high density of very early finds could be observed. The excavations that were started by the Ephorate as a result of these finds discovered the foundations of houses of a middle Helladic settlement. In late Geometric times these were covered by a sanctuary. The continuity of this cult can be demonstrated up until the Roman period (see below). In the Geometric and Archaic periods the number of find spots increases constantly. The densest settlement of the Stratiké dates, however, from Classical and Hellenistic times. During these periods, many small settlements and a great number of single farms existed outside the fortified city especially in the western part of the polis territory. Moreover many remains of dwellings could be found west of



Fig. 5. Stratos. Theatre.

the city obviously belonging to a kind of suburb immediately adjacent to the city walls. North and south of these suburbs extended large necropoleis from Classical and Hellenistic times. The spatial extent of the southern necropolis, which is largely covered by the present village, and of the western necropolis, could largely be settled. Especially remarkable is the discovery of a hitherto unknown necropolis north of the city where there were not only graves with stone slabs and sarcophagi, many of which can be found in the other necropoleis as well, but also grave-terraces, as those above all else, are typical for Attica. There are also many examples of grave steles in a form typical for Western Greece, which can be assigned to these grave-terraces now. Up until now we had only little knowledge of their positioning.

In Roman times the great plain southwest of Stratos developed apparently into the preferred settlement area. In the present

state of excavations, it is impossible to decide whether the area within the ancient city walls of Stratos was settled in Roman times as well.²⁴ At any rate, the center of the settlement seems to have shifted to an unfortified place with a bath complex west of the modern village of Ochthia (about 3 kilometres southwest of Stratos). Although the number of finds from Roman times is considerably smaller in comparison to previous periods, it shows that the habitation of the region in the Roman era was greater than presumed. Since even finds from early Imperial times were discovered, the continuity of habitation apparently was not completely disrupted by the founding of Nikopolis and the Roman colony at Patras. A clearly visible decline in this area must be noted for the first phase, when the Roman Empire established its power, but in Imperial times settlement activities – at least outside the old city of Stratos – revived considerably.

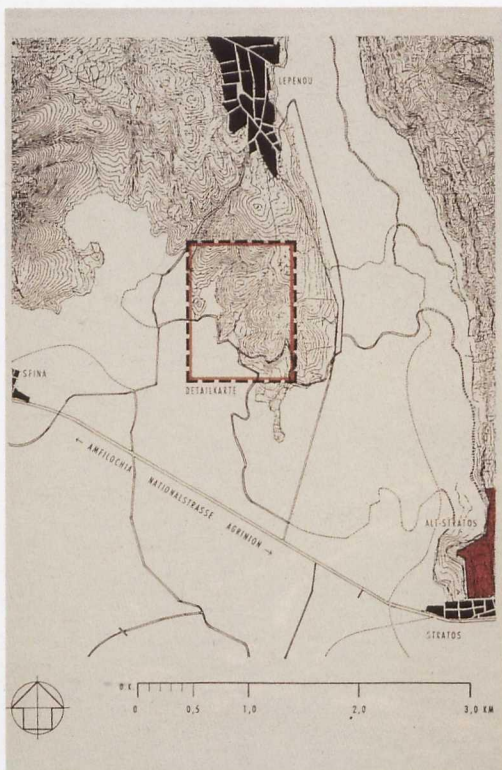


Fig. 6. Plan of the Ancient quarry in the territory of Stratos.

I wish also to mention some especially important ancient finds separately. About 4 kilometers northwest of Stratos and one kilometre south of the village of Lepenou in an impassable area a quarry was discovered that had been used in Classical and Hellenistic times. Its high-quality shining white limestone was used especially for the construction of public buildings in the city (Fig. 6). Some of the many raw capital, column and architrave components, that lie strewn across the site, were designed for the temple of Zeus in Stratos and other buildings. Previously, it had been common opinion that the stone material for representative buildings in the city had to be transported from the Akarnanian coast more than 50 kilometres away. Now, it has been proved that the quarries were located in the immediate neighbourhood of the city.

Within the boundaries of Spathari at the southern verge of this quarry area on a hill above the plain of Stratos a significant concentration of ancient pottery and tiles



Fig. 7. Spathari. Temple (photo taken from balloon).

of different periods and traces of settlement could already be observed during the first survey campaign in 1991. When the documentation of the find spot started in autumn 1993 with a cleaning of the surface, the foundations of a 17 x 11,5 meter rectangular building were discovered immediately under the sward. On the north side, parts of the wall with the orthostates were even preserved on which, originally, a wall of sun-dried mud bricks had stood. The Ephorate began immediately upon excavations which are still continuing. The building proved to be an oikos temple or temple in antis that had already been constructed in the middle of



Fig. 8. Spathari. Temple
(N and W sides).

the 6th century BC and lasted up to the 1st / 2nd century AD (Figs. 7, 8 and 10).²⁵ In a collapse layer not only the greater part of the roof from late Hellenistic times (2nd / 1st century BC) was found, but also many structural components of a roof from Archaic times (about 550/40 B.C.) with, in parts, still well preserved painting. The examination of the Archaic roof construction (Fig. 9) carried out by Ernst-Ludwig Schwandner and Jörg Denkinger led to the conclusion that this is to now the “wohl früheste Kombination von Traufsimma und Anthemien-Antefixabschluss der Kalyptere (‘Reiterantefixe’) für das griechische Mutterland”.²⁶ The origins of the temple, however, reach back far beyond Archaic times. Northeast of the temple foundations of a house of a middle Helladic settlement were found; south of the temenos wall, the foundations of an apsidal building from late the Geometric or early Archaic period were discovered. Its function has not been definitely clarified up but it might be a sort of hestiatio-

tion, according to the interpretation of the excavators.

In the plain east of Spathari and about 3,5 kilometers northwest of Stratos, a second hitherto unknown sanctuary has been discovered. An examination of a recently ploughed field led to the recovery of hundreds of terracotta fragments, mostly of female statuettes dating from the late Archaic to the late Classical period (Fig. 11).²⁷ In the ensuing rescue excavation the Ephorate uncovered the remains of a sacrificial pit (*bothros*) of stone construction that, apart from remains of coal and ashes, contained a large number of further votive statuettes. Corinthian and Lakonian roof tile fragments of superior quality, as well as two large well hewn limestone blocks on the edge of the field that obviously served as threshold of an ancient house, gave eloquent testimony of larger buildings that must have belonged to this sanctuary. In spite of intensive archaeological and geophysical investigations, a corresponding

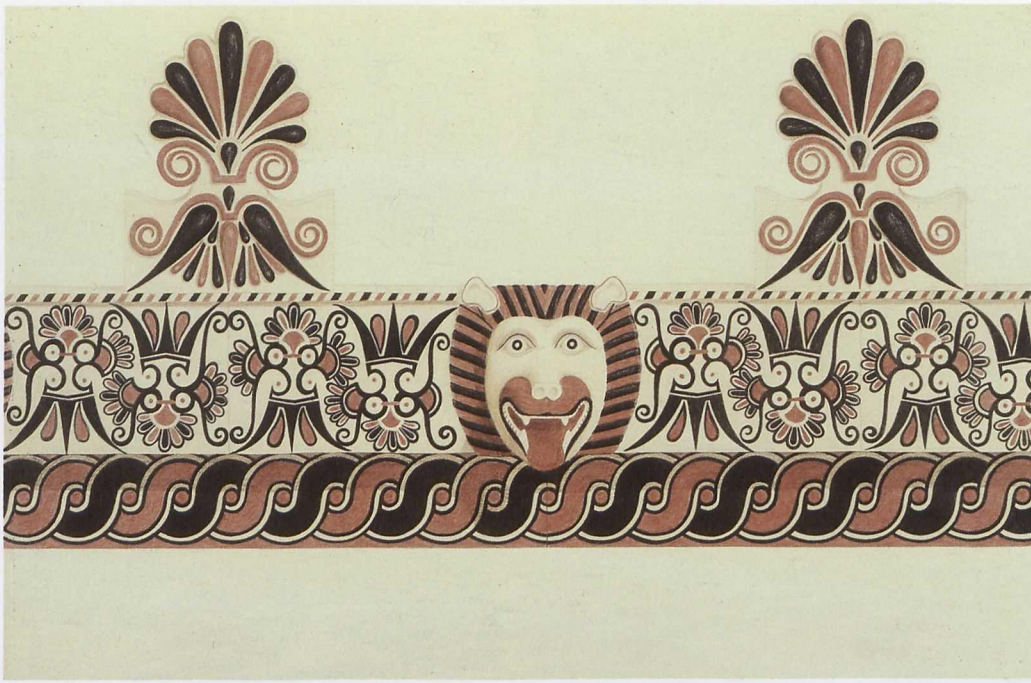


Fig. 9. Spathari. Roof of temple (reconstruction of the Archaic eaves, drawing by E.-L. Schwandner).



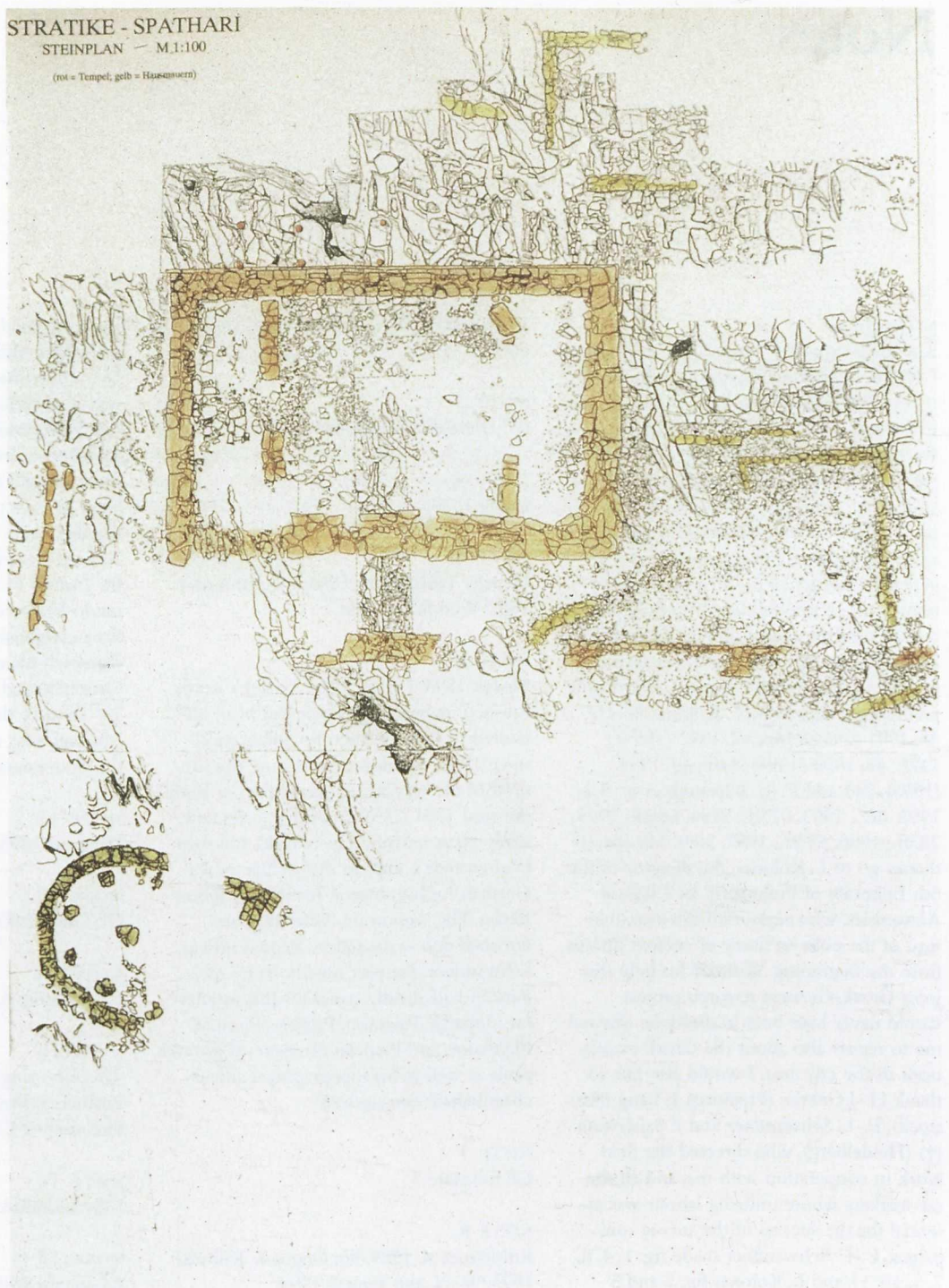
Fig. 11. Stratiké. Votive statuettes.

site could not be discovered. Probably the buildings we were looking for are located at a site where recently a small farm house with stables had been erected.

This preliminary overview of the most recent archaeological and historical-geographical research in the ancient city of

Stratos and the surrounding territory of the Stratiké ought only to give a first impression of the aims, methods and results of this joint Greek-German research project. An extensive and complete evaluation is left to the final publications, which are now in process, of the survey and the excavations.²⁸

Fig. 10. Spathari.
Ground plan of temple
(1998, drawing by
E.-L.Schwandner).



Notes

NOTE 1*

The following text is based on a paper that I read at the symposium and on the final report that I wrote together with K. Freitag (Münster) and F. Lang (Rostock) for the German Research Community (DFG) which sponsored this research project on a large scale. Since the field work was finished only in 1998 and the archaeological excavations are still going on, only a very general summary of the first preliminary results can be offered here. The final presentation of the results will be published by Franziska Lang in an extensive evaluation of all data. For the time being I refer to the preliminary reports by L. Kolonas in *AD* 46, 1991 (1991), 163; 47, 1992 (1997), 147f.; 48, 1993 (1998), 140f.; 49, 1994 (1999), 242 and E.-L. Schwandner in *AA* 1992, 66f.; 1993, 677ff.; 1994, 605ff.; 1995, 783ff.; 1996, 555ff.; 1997, 509f. My special thanks go to L. Kolonas, the director of the 6th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, who supported the examination of the polis territory of ancient Stratos from the beginning. Without his help this joint Greek-German research project would never have been realized; he allowed me to report also about the Greek excavations in the city area. I would also like to thank H.-J. Gehrke (Freiburg), F. Lang (Rostock), E.-L. Schwandner and F. Sauerwein (†) (Heidelberg), who directed the field work in cooperation with me, and all the co-workers whose untiring labour was essential for the success of the survey campaigns. E.-L. Schwandner made fig. 1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11 and L. Kolonas fig. 3 and 5 available.

NOTE 2

Only during the last ten years has the research work on the ancient history of this area been intensified; cf. (with further literature) Bommeljé et al 1987; Antonetti 1990; Pritchett 1991, passim; Pritchett 1992, passim; Pritchett 1994a; Gehrke 1995; Freitag 1996; Strauch 1996; Funke 1997; Beck 1997, esp. 31-54; Dietz et al. 1998; Corsten 1999, esp. 94-159; Grainger

1999; Dany 1999; Wacker 1999; Scholten 2000.

NOTE 3

Cf. Dietz et al. 1998, 244-252.

NOTE 4

Leake 1835.

NOTE 5

Heuzey 1860; Bazin 1864; Oberhummer 1887; Woodhouse 1897.

NOTE 6

Noack 1894; Noack 1916. Noack's nearly finished manuscript, which had been entrusted to Ernst Kirsten for publication since 1938, was destroyed during the turmoil of the war at the occupation of Berlin (Kirsten 1951, 253). Extensive notes and many plans remained in Noack's scholarly bequest that is kept in the archive of the German Archaeological Institute (DAI) at Berlin. The section on Akarnania was screened and evaluated by Ernst-Ludwig Schwandner, the part on Aitolia by me. Kirsten had already based his RE-articles on Oiniadai, Paianion, Palairos, Phoittai, Phythaiion and Pleuron on some of Noack's plans as well as his topographical and archaeological descriptions.

NOTE 7

Cf. footnote 5.

NOTE 8

Kolonas et al. 1989/90; Gogos & Kolonas 1995/96; cf. also Freitag 1994.

NOTE 9

Cf. for the time being Wacker 1999.

NOTE 10

Courby & Picard 1924.

NOTE 11

The discovery of an up to now totally unknown Byzantine phase of settlement is to be considered one of the most important results of the exploration of the Stratiké.

Koder & Hild 1976 listed this region as an area still without the slightest remains from Byzantine times. The results of the field survey as well as of the excavations in the city fundamentally changed this picture. In addition to the remains of several churches, some villages were also discovered that were densely populated especially in middle Byzantine times; cf. Schwandner 1994. The very productive results of research on the history of human settlement in Akarnania in late medieval and early modern times, which had been carried out by Friedrich Sauerwein on the basis of the Ottoman land-register from the 16th to the 18th century, that had been analysed by Machiel Kiel, must left aside here; cf. for the time being Sauerwein 2000.

NOTE 12

Weigand 1895, esp. 187-192.

NOTE 13

Cf. Thuk. 2.80.8.

NOTE 14

Cf. footnote 6.

NOTE 15

The surveying was carried out by J. Barthel, A. Preiss and Th. Tsingas under the direction of E.-L. Schwandner.

NOTE 16

Schwandner & Kolonas 1996.

NOTE 17

Cf. for the historical background Strauch 1996 (with further literature).

NOTE 18

Heuzey 1860, 332 (fig. 2); Courby & Picard 1924, esp. 96-99.

NOTE 19

Courby & Picard 1924, 96ff.

NOTE 20

Courby & Picard 1924, 99 and pl. 1; cf. Heuzey 1860, 332 (fig. 2).

NOTE 21

Cf. the maps of the survey area in Franziska Lang's contribution to this volume (p. 205ff.). Most recent palynological investigations show that Lake Ozeros emerged only in post-antique times and therefore today covers part of the polis area of Stratos.

NOTE 22

Cf. p. 211ff.

NOTE 23

Cf. the contribution of Franziska Lang and the corresponding maps of the diachronic

and regional distribution of the finds in the survey area (p. 209ff.); cf. also Lang 1994.

NOTE 24

No monumental remains from Roman times were found at the excavations in the agora area except for the altar mentioned above, whereas there is rich evidence for the Byzantine phase of settlement; cf. Schwandner 1994.

NOTE 25

Cf. for the construction finds for the time being Schwandner 1996; Nirmaier 2000.

NOTE 26

Schwandner 1996, 52.

NOTE 27

Schwandner 1995, 783f.

NOTE 28

Cf. footnote 1*.

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