The Rock Antiquity of Eleusis

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Eleusis is a topos of faith, which dates millennia back. The hereditary layering of sacred buildings continued also with the change of religion during the 5th century over the Telesio, a church was built, and over the cave called Phrontis the Temple of St. Praxedis stands until the present day (Travlos 1988, 98 with references).

The clarification of the earliest period of the sanctuary and of the faith-formation preferred there is difficult not only because of the lack of written sources for this period and the destruction of the earlier layers by numerous constructions and reconstructions in the sanctuary, but also because of the distractions due to the early archaeological missions, the incomplete publications and, not infrequently, due to the prejudiced interpretations of the source data. N. A. Silberman (1999) used the phrase modern social ideology in the changes of interpretation of the archaeological data for the collapse of the Late Bronze Age societies in the Mediterranean which were traced by him, and also for the role of the “sea people”, from the viewpoint of the Eurocentrism of the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century and of the social disintegration resulting from the industrialization which followed it, the international competition and the origin of powerful economic centers outside Europe. During the last ten or fifteen years of the twentieth century, the new “social ideologies” and “political waves”, as well as the quick sociological-status’ changes cause their influence even over the research on the Homeric epic (Silberman, 1998, 272, for interpretation of the transformations in the oral epic tradition).

The successful attempts for surrounding the uncertainties surrounding the architecture and stratigraphy of the so-called megaron B and the rooms B1, B2, B3 connected with it at Eleusis belong to M. L. Cosmopoulos, who re-examined the archaeological documentation: diaries, drawings, sketches, plans, photos, field specimen catalogues and finds, including the unpublished material (Cosmopoulos 2003). He reached the conclusion that megaron B had served at the same time as a family house and temple, and was surrounded by a wall. The platform erected above had to get a constructional role, it was an altar for fire ritualism (pyre), whose parallel for the Mycenaean period is found 1

1For the use of the term megaron in Eleusis see Cosmopoulos 2003, No. 4, for the etymology of the term see Werner 1993.
2Cosmopoulos used also the unpublished plan of Pissarides’ Telesio made by J. Travlos with the Mycenaean walls (Fig. 11) marked B1.
in the early Mycenaean temple in Epidaurus. The big number of statuettes found in the periphery of megaron B is a sign of ritual activity. According to M. L. Cosmopolous, the analysis of the archaeological data shows that the ritual practices during that period included libations, animal sacrifices and votive offerings (figurines). The rituals were practiced in the yard and behind the walls, and the periboloi provided their secrecy. This ritualism, according to the pottery, most probably began in LH II B and perhaps continued also through LH II B, when the expansions of B1, B2 and B3 are dated.1
G. Mylonas assumed that the building with three rooms had been connected to the Mycenaean megaron and had been an annex to it. The chambers probably functioned also during the geometric period, to which belong two vessel handles (7th cent. BC), found over the oldest Mycenaean layer. The two handles are in the form of a griffin and of a pigeon (Mylonas 1961, 3, 7, 33-51). P. Darque resourcefully opposed Mylonas with the assumption that maybe the floor had been contemporaneous with the handles (1981, 399).2
M. L. Cosmopolous reconstructed the architectural development of megaron B according to the following principles: first, during MH and early LH period, a small rectangular building existed; megaron B, the platform and the periboloi were built in LH II III A1, while rooms B1, B2 and B3 date back to the LH II B period. The enlargements and constructive changes, as M. L. Cosmopolous notes, show a progressive development and "may suggest an initially unstructured and informal cult, which with the passage of time became more formalized" (Cosmopolous 2003, 199). In his research on the "official" and "poplar cult", R. Hagg (1981) supposed that with the building of the periboloi at Eleusis, the profession of an "official cult" had been formed. The next stage in the development of the sanctuary, however, remains questionable also in M. L. Cosmopolous' studies.
G. E. Mylonas (1961, 3, 7, 33-51) and J. Travlos (1988, 91-102, Figs. 108-124) accept that the cult to Demeter and Kore was established around the middle of the 2nd mill. BC in the Telesterion3 and continued uninterrupted until the 5th cent. According to Travlos, the Mycenaean megaron was a house of the Eumolpidae where they resided also a family cult to Demeter. Later, when the importance of the cult increased, the three-chambered annex designed for Eumolpidae’s house has been built, while the

1 For the 1995 discovery of traced periboloi from the EH II period in the area of the sanctuary see Cosmopolous 2003, 2, 3 and Nr. 6.
2 According to Darque megaron B is nothing more than Mycenaean ruins. Other authors also doubted that megaron B had been used for religious purposes during the earliest period. See Dietrich 1974, 224; Infavistikos 1980, 189-193, and especially 192. For the LH II period; see also references in Cosmopolous 2003, 20, Nos. 2-3.
3 See the last considerations of the archaeological material in Cosmopolous 2003, 2-18.
4 For the formalization of the Mycenaean religiousness and for the architectural decisions to which those processes lead to, see Wright 1994.
5 See Clinton 1992, 126-132 for the rare usage of the word – sometimes in the Greek literature tradition. Out of those seven times, five meant "an initiation hall". For the edifice in the Eleusian sanctuary it was used very late, by Plutarch in Pericles 15: 7, as the author mentions. K. Clinton considers the term in great detail and notes that almost as well as megaron are the ones used most frequently, including in epigraphic monuments, for marking a place for sacred actions. See the summary regarding the terms used for Eleusis with the parallel ones for Samothrace in Clinton 2003.

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megaron was used for temple needs only (Travlos 1988, 92). After M. L. Cosmopoulos' studies, J. Travlos' hypothesis regained its actuality but we have to remind that it belongs to M. P. Nilsson (1950, 468ff.). Taking the results of the nineteenth century studies on the pre-Greek (pelasgan) character of the cult to Demeter in the sanctuary, which were drawn from the written sources also into consideration, M. P. Nilsson formulated his conclusions. According to him, an agrarian cult was practiced at Eleusis during the Mycenaean period. It was a family cult, professed by the people living in megaron B, and became a universal cult in a later period.

According to the two conceptions for the development of religiousness from the Mycenaean period to the "Dark Ages" and later on, two theories for the changes in the cults to Demeter were formulated. According to one of them, the buildings where the cult had been professed during the pre-Greek period retained, of course, their functions after it as well. According to the other theory, the houses and castles of the rulers-priests from the Mycenaean period were transformed into temples during the following period. Even during his early research of the development and origin of the temples from the houses of local leaders/baulkies, A. J. Mazarakis-Ainian supported Travlos' hypothesis for megaron B at Eleusis and did not abandon it even in his monograph (1988, 115f., 1997, 347f.; for the doubts regarding the early use of the megaron for religious purposes see p. 149).

F. Noack (1927, 12-14), V. R. D'A. Desborough (1964, 114f.), and W. Burkert (1985, 49 and No. 26) accept that the cult to Demeter at Eleusis was established around 700 BC. Later authors specify that the 8th cent. BC is the most probable time when the mysteries were instituted, and that fasting in the dark began in the second half of the 7th cent. This is obvious from the finds in the pyre of the votive bearers, described and called "Alila". It is a structure, which is located inside, next to the foundation of the angular wall, which surrounds the terrace from the geometric period. In this pyre the earliest materials from the geometric period of the Telestasion are to be found. G. Mylonas (1961, 57) and J. Travlos (1982, 92) opinion is, that this structure belongs to the Mycenaean megaron, which was located on this terrace, and that the materials found there were put in situ next to the wall. J. Binder (1998, 134) accepts that the pyre of the bearers and the angular surrounding wall belong to one and the same site.

The votive offerings found in the pyre date between the end of the 8th and the first

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1 Noack considers the offerings from the early archaic period and concludes that there are no traces proving cult-related activity between LH III B and 700 BC, in the Telestasion. This thesis is accepted also by V. R. D'A. Desborough, W. Burkert and others. Noack supposed that Demeter's temple and the Telestasion are two separate edifices and that probably temple F, dated by him to the archaic period, played the role of a Telestasion until the new temple was built. He stipulated his view before the excavation in the third decade of the twentieth century, which had proved that Demeter's temple and the Telestasion are one and the same edifice, and temple F is from the Roman era.

2 This wall is preserved in the Telestasion. In the west south part, several stirs are standing, which lead inside terrace at a 90 degree angle. F. Noack (1927, 11) defined this terrace at Demeter's first cult location, meant for sacred actions in open air. Based on the materials, he dated the wall between the late geometric and the early archaic period. W. Burkert (1985, 288) adopted Noack's thesis and added the possibility that the ritualism might occur around a fire. According to J. Travlos (1982, 92) this wall was built in 8th cent. BC under the Delphi's oracle immediate influence from 760 BC. The Delphi's oracle recommended an enlargement of the sanctuary (the megaron).

3 Generally for sacrifices at Eleusis see Clinton 1986.
decade of the 7th c. BC (Noack 1927, Figs. 4; 5; Binder 1958, 134, with references and detailed list in Nos. 20-23). Among the donations hand-made oinochoai, macrochome Argive vases, early spherical proto-Corinthian mythablos and a lot of rectangular clay tablets with tripod and big birds (birds?) painted on them, are to be found. In the pyre, 107 terra cotta figurines were found, two of which date back to the end of the 8th century BC. One of them may represent a cart-driver the parallels of which are from the sanctuaries in Olympia and Samos. The second figurine belongs to a goddess seated on a throne, which is composed of the front sides of horses. Doubtless, the lamps are most interesting. They date back to the second half of the 7th century BC. J. Binder (1998, 134 and No. 23) thinks that they possibly show the time when the night ceremonies were introduced. I would propose a specification of her opinion, namely, that the lamps show the time when the rituals were transferred inside. This would better correspond to the proven ritual constructions from the geometric period. According to J. Travlos (1968, 92, Fig. 115) five archaeological structures in the Eleusis sanctuary date back to the same period.

The so-called sacred horn, which belongs to the early period, is situated outside the defense walls (5th c. BC). The building was dated by G. Mylonas (1961, 59-62), according to the earliest sherds found in the ashes, which belong to the beginning of the 7th century BC. J. Travlos dated the construction itself to the 8th century BC, following his theory for the upringer of the sanctuary after 760 BC by recommendation of Delphi. According to J. Travlos, the Eleusinian culture moved into this home after they had let the annex of the Myceneaean megaron when the sanctuary had been enlarged. J. Travlos dated the pottery found with the ashes, back to the end of the 8th century BC and explained it with cultural activity of earlier inhabitants. He described the grave found east of the building, as doubtful burial of a member of the Eleusinian family who lived in this home (Travlos 1988, 92, Fig. 115). I consider as unjustified the theory that this building belonged to an "industrial district" and was a place for ceramic production, including production of votive ceramics. No remains of a kiln or other artifacts expected from a potter's workshop had been found in the building.

Actually, all researchers see the building only as a place designed for rituals. As I said, W. Burkert accepted the possibility of open-air rituals before Solon's time but he did not develop his guess because he was not acquainted with the preserved rock-cut monuments for ritualism in southeastern Europe and did not recognize them at Eleusis.

The initial rock chamber of the Eleusis sanctuary was preserved until the end of the

1. Adams: establishment of the pan-Hellenic Eupnoia (a celebration of the expected ploughing and sacrifice) in the Eleusinian sanctuary is placed to the Delphic oracle. It is disputable when exactly this occurred because the readings of Homer's Iliad are different. Herodotus, 4: 7. Adams cites three different dates: the Third Olympiad (according to Homer), the first Olympic (according to Pindar) and the 21st Olympiad (according to others). H. W. Parke concluded that this had happened during Homer's time and dated the Delphic recommendation back to the early 6th century BC. J. Binder 1998, 136 with amsorts and references in Nos. 32-34. J. Binder claims that G. Mylonas' and J. Travlos' opinions are not confirmed, and that there is no archaeological data for Eupnoia during the 9th century BC.

2. For this hypothesis, returned without commentary, see Binder 1998, 135.

3. Burkert 1965, 288: "celebration of the open-air around a fire before the building activities of the Solonian epoch". The suppression of rituals on the open space around an altar was made even by F. Noack.

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sanctuary/sexistence (Noske 1927, 168; Travlos 1988, 92). This was noted from the beginning of the research. Even, Lucius, one of the builders of the Parthenon, and architect of the new Temple of the 5th cent. B.C. established the same idea (Noske 1927, 167-175), and the Mycenaean tradition of formatting the sacred space accessible to a few. The walls, which surround the building, retain the peribolos and the temple only for the eyesight of the mystes. According to F. Noack, the middle part of the yard was covered. The understanding for a sanctuary originates inside the architecturally framed space and not outside it.

Even though the idea of initiation in a confined space (identical to a rock womb) is clearly expressed in the Teistrian, no connection in the rock past of the sanctuary had ever been sought. According to F. Noack (1927, 21), the first hall of the Teistrian was the conceptual Hades entrance, but this cannot be proved by excavations. Some author thinks (1927, 242) that Kore's abduction was enacted in the Teistrian, and for this reason he disagrees with the stated opinion that there had been a basement under the Teistrian. This opinion was proved by later excavations. The case as an entrance and exit from the Beyond and the rock thrower where Dionsyter was seeking are among the most important markers of the Eleusia's mystical ritualism, and are proven by P. Clinton. I would add that the chora also belongs to the pre-Classical (called "pre-Greek" in literature) Great Mother Goddess. Clinton's analysis (1992) is based on the entire source material for the Eleusia sanctuary and the mysteries; written, epigraphic archeological and visual data. Despite all this, he and the authors before him, did not pay attention to the rock sanctuaries in southeast Europe, Anatolia and many Phrygia, where they are documented best (Havelot 1971, Fok 2000; Vassileva 2001; Roller 2002 and 2003). The lack of even a comparison with these groups of monuments limits the opportunity for interpretation of the rock Artizity of the Eleusis sanctuary. For this reason, the living rock with a bichen shape1 located in the southwest end of the Teistrian and outlined by all reconstructions (Noske 1927, 149), remained outside the interpretative schemes. F. Noack stated the rock's preservation during the different periods of the sanctuary but he dismissed its importance as a "central motive" in the cult; an opinion expressed as early as the end of the nineteenth century, but later forgotten (Noske 1927, 21 with references). This rock had been even removed from the later plans.

The rock is "2-3 feet tall" (Noske 1927, 226) and, according to F. Noack, could be covered with a wooden podium. The measurement of its height in feet is, however, not accurate. Actually, the rock is not small at all: 2 or 3 feet equal 0.61-1.50 m height and was not levelled as it had been done at other places. If it did not have a cult function,

1 Noack saw all ritual activities only in temple buildings and for this reason, he did not agree with the opinions made even in his time but the case had been the same for the imagined prehistory.

2 Marked as Teistrian 2 as F. Noack's plan.

3 This living rock is preserved in the temple from Pausanias's time as well as in the building constructed by Glinos. However, according to Noack, the rock was under a wooden podium and was not seen. In Noske 1927, Tab. 18-16, the rock is marked. In the plan of the Teistrian made in the Roman era, the living rock is missing. In the plans published by F. Noack, all corrections of the living rock had been inserted where the sanctuarity was spread out. One can see how the temple was gradually evolved with the construction of the terraces and new buildings and reconstructions of old buildings. All these details had been removed from the plans published later.
IKomous wouldn't have hesitated to destroy it. He retained in an architectural way the Mycenean idea for a hidden ritualism, embodied in his Telesterion project. It is possible that Fiskaleia Z is "Mythless Rock" (Ἀγάλματος τῆς Ῥάκης) where, according to the Homeric hymn, Demeter sat down when she came to Eleusis. For F. Noack, however, the place where the Goddess had grieved was not a main altar for the topos of faith around which the sanctuary would have developed. For this reason he did not make an attempt to identify the marker, even though he accepted the Telesterion as an entrance to Hades.

The other sacred place from Eleusis' earliest period was the sacred cave called Ploutonion. F. Noack defined it as "a stone and sacred sanctuary," together with the bothros underneath it. The bothros leads to a stone ladder (Noack 1927, 8, 13, 78-81, 218, 267, description of the location; p. 89, description of the ladder leading to the rock bothros; p. 207, description of the entrance). As he noted, the first impression from Eleusis is the big hole in the rock and the small church of St. Patagia over it (Noack 1927, 78, Taf. 6). The cave is located 11 meters above sea level. In the 5th cent. BC, the sacred perimeter was formed with the wall of the terrace. The entrance was from the southeast corner. In the depth of the entrance, there was a door closing the cave to prevent the sacred rituals inside from being seen. Building inscription and traces of sun-dried brick walls are to be found (Noack 1927, 78, Abb. 37, Taf. 5). The temple in front of the cave was built in the second half of the 5th cent. BC. At some places, the blocks were added directly on the rock; at other places apparently the living rock had been specially shaped. This temple was built over a building from the archaic period. Only small blocks of local Eleusis stone had remained from that building. In the 4th cent. BC, some reconstructions were done. The buildings in the periods listed were built directly over the rock, without any artificial platform being prepared beforehand. During the Roman era, the cave was monitored. A passage belonging to it was also constructed. Rock-cut stairs lead toward the documented bothros in front of the cave (Noack 1927, 79ff., Taf. 30, Abb. 38: a plan of the cave from Pausanias' time).

K.Clinton looked at Ἀγάλματος τῆς Ῥάκης in another way. For him, it was a main marker in the Homeric hymn of Demeter, and it played a major role in the beliefs and rituals of the Eleusins' mysteries. The images with a story line from the Eleusins' mysteries collected by the author, and his analysis of Demeter seated on the rock, confirm his opinion (1992, 14, No. 2, 121-123 with references and images; 1986, 1988). Ἀγάλματος

1 Noack asked the question whether a human can imagine such walls, but did not provide an answer. The Ploutonion does not occupy any space in F. Noack's reconstructions of the mysteries, even though there was a theatre built in front of it. The author discussed in detail the possibility of the Telesterion being the place where the mysteries observed the sacred drama, and dismissed it completely by emphasizing that the building was not made to serve a "ritually-dramatic ritual." And even if such a ritual was practiced at the Telesterion, it was observed by different groups according to a pre-arranged program. F. Noack could not propose any other place, like the Ploutonion, for imagining Kent's exit from Hades. He even could not suppose that the Homeric text might call upon only chosen mystics to watch the sacred drama. About the sacred drama at Eleusis see Clinton 1992, 84-89.

2 Figura: the inscription found, the setting was only doubtlessly identified as a Hekate temple (Travers 1980, 96). During the Late Antiquity, a wide wall was built in front of the Ploutonion (Travers 1988, 96; see Clinton 1992, 116-120 for the honoring of Hekate at Eleusis).
Heads is presented as an "aeromorphous rock or a location at a high place, sometimes in egg-like form." For this reason, K. Clinton searched for Αυλάκαρτος Πήρεα in the site, despite that the written sources do not specify exactly its place. He concluded that the natural seat-throne in the cave, in front of which the space is artificially stair-shaped, had been the correct place where Demeter was sitting (see Clinton 1992, 23, ll. 4). The five-meter deep cave was discovered by the French archaeological mission in the 1950s. The cave was an extension of the Ploutonion. The remains of coins and bull and sheep sacrifices doubtlessly show that the cave was used for ritual purposes. K. Clinton defined exactly this cave as the perceived entrance to Hades.

The Πλούτωνιον at Eleusis is a natural cave, the entry to which is located from the east. As I noted before, the stone space in front of the throne is artificially stair-shaped. The cutting in the rock from the east side of the throne is more likely a bench or a shelf. The throne faces east-northeast1. K. Clinton (1992, 32f., Figs. III 4, 5; see No. 43 for the an dried brick walls of the space, and No. 49 for the excavations of the French expedition in the 1930s) interpreted the cave itself as Πήρεα.

The strange rock, which is located at the side of the sacred road leading to the Telesterion (made in the Roman era), is in itself another possibility of identifying Αυλάκαρτος Πήρεα. The rock is close to the Roman temple F and F. Noack called it "Felgeschauvon Tempel F" (1927, 266f., Abb. 94, Taf. 32 a-o). The huge piece of stone is well attached to (inserted into) the terrain of the Temple's termes. F. Noack was certain that the rock had nothing to do with the ancient places for sacrificial offerings. He searched for an explanation about the rock in an inscription from 329 BC. The inscription informed of two treasuries. According to F. Noack, this treasury was not comparable to the Delphic one. He sought for the meaning of this "rock treasury" in Pasianias' text for the Πείρατος in the city of Phocaea (Pass. 8: 15, 11f.; Roda-Pereira; see my analysis of the text in Foi 2001). According to him, the entire space described by Pasianias, was not bigger than the "rock treasury" in Eleusis. Thus, F. Noack sought for another ritual meaning of the term. The conscientious drawing of the rock, as well as the author's description show a rock airt 115 cm high and 180 cm in diameter. A round hollow is dug on the top. 55 cm deep and 55 cm in diameter. According to F. Noack, the circular hollow-dug in the rock was covered. Possibly due to the lack of grooves around the oper. 2 1Clinton 1992, 24-27 with sources of the mentioning of Αυλάκαρτος Πήρεα and the opinions of the different authors, see p. 14, No. 7, for the image of Demeter sitting on a rock, on a red-figure vase-krater, inscription included.

2 The temple had been used under No. 7 of the cave plan. In my opinion, Clinton is right to use F. Noack's plan, since it is the most detailed one.

3 The rock cut through an area where people believed in the appearance of the Great Mother Goddess is well known in the Phrygian religion. The so-called stables (Hespeles 1971, 93-96) or thrones (Köte, Köte 1984, 22; Vassilieva 1995; Götz 2002) in Phrygia always face to the east (Hespeles 1971, 93). Usually, these rock constructions are part of a complex. They constitute a shaped living rock. Their composition includes a hole, which leads up in a chimney/door with a back. The most important example is the "altar" or the "throne" on the plateau of the "City of Molos", which also has a two-line inscription on its left side (Hespeles 1971, Fig. 26 and the disposition of the site on the map on Fig. 295 6, for the inscription see Vassilieva 1995 and 2000).

4 Thanos 1988, 97 refers temple F as a temple of the new Demeter in the Roman era. It is also considered for one of the treasuries mentioned in the inscription.
The priest “who carries a stone” Ἱερός Ἄρτιορος (Clinton 1974, 98) is a strong indirect proof for the Mycenaean rock Anceinty of Eleusis. The first mentioning of the priest occurred in a decree for the Dedace Theomithocles from the year 2010 BC on lines 15-18 (Clinton 1974, 51). The priest is simultaneously minister of the local gods Zeus Horios, Artemis Horia, Poseidon Prostheodorus, and Poseidon Themelichos. The next mentioning of the priest was in a dedication from the end of the 2nd cent. where the title of the inscription is called Μ. Ἄρτιορος Ἀρτιορος Προστεδεπτος Πασχαρίτος Κοινίστικος. Another inscription, dated back to the 2nd cent. specified that a seat into the proedria of Θιανας' theatre had been allocated to the “priest who carries the stone” (ἵερος ἄρτιορός) according to K. Clinton (1974, 98 with references), the function of this priest is not clear, because the nature of the sacred stone is not known. Later, the author (1992, 127) returned to Θιανας Αρτιος in his analysis of the iconography of the Eleusis' mysteries in order to reconstruct the cult and the myth. He overcame his skepticism regarding the connection between the title and the mysteries (Clinton 1974, 98 with references), and accepted that Ἄρτιορος had been a priest of the mysteries; “and the form of the man's name, with its allusion to ἴσταινομυ, a custom that was practiced only by Eleusinian priests, leaves no doubt” (Clinton 1992, 122, Nos. 7, 8).

I think that the earliest period of Eleusis belongs to the Mycenaean epoch. Except the established Mycenaean constructions, the sanctuary includes a stone ridge with a cave where the throne for the mystical appearance of god is located. The following things belong to the complex: the boulders near the cave, probably for plant donations; “the rock treasury”, i.e. the rock altar, the sacred spring and the living rock in the corner of the future Telestion. It is possible that this rock was located in the home-sanctuary of a priest’s family of Eurypylus and served as a place to take sacred oaths. As Itcman built a circle in the court of the Telestion from the 5th cent. BC, he probably kept the sacred location marked with a heath.

References:


1 During Nero's time the multiple rock altars from this kind on the Breguza, Tarnobrzeg, Macżownia and Greek territory (see Fog 2000) have not yet been drawn the attention of the researchers, and the ethnologist had not yet occupied themselves with the faith in them.


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