

The Athens Greek Religion Seminar, March 8 2016

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What is 'True' Ionian? Some Thoughts About Homer, the Panionion, Athens, and Beyond

Abstract

The Panionion-sanctuary on the central west coast of Asia Minor has attracted the attention of many scholars in the last 100 years and still does. One of the reasons is that the *Panionion* as well as the Ionians feasting during the *Panionia*, defined Greekness in the presence of the non-Greek, *barbarian*, other. The Panionion was placed at the edge of the Greek world, so to speak, facing the neighbouring indigenous peoples of the Karians and Lydians. It is now a common view in Ancient history that the ethnogenesis of the Ionian Greeks, as well as that of the Aeolians and Dorians, took place in Asia Minor only in Geometric times. The settlers arriving in Asia Minor in Protogeometric times were of diverse origin instead. The romantic view of an Ionian *ethnos* migrating already in the 11th/10th century BCE from Achaea or Athens has to be abandoned. Also, recent studies of the history of the Homeric epics and their earliest performance come to the conclusion that *Iliad* and *Odyssey* form part of the creation of the Greek. The poet Homer, or whatever his real name was, entered the stages not only in some of the cities of Ionia, but first of all during the common gatherings in the Panionion. This new theory offers reason enough to turn our look towards this sanctuary. But there is also another one: it has been claimed recently that a temple which has been found on top of the Mykale Mountains, today's Dilek Dağları in western Turkey, north of the Maeander-valley and opposite the Greek island of Samos, is the Archaic Panionion. However, this hypothesis cannot stand a critical review. Instead, an alternative identification as temple of Zeus Mykaleus is offered. According to a myth created by the Boeotian-'Ionian' Greeks migrating in the Mykale Mountains, it had been built by the hero Perseus, after he had decapitated Gorgo Medousa and escaped her sisters, a classical charter myth.