



THE ATHENS GREEK RELIGION SEMINAR, Tuesday January 18, 2022, at 17h Athens time (limited live presence and via Zoom link).

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Who was the Deity worshiped? Revisiting a Sanctuary on Messenian Mount Ithome

ABSTRACT

The small prostyle temple on the southern slope of Mount Ithome was until recently identified with the sanctuary of Eileithyia and the Kouretes which was seen by the second-century AD traveller Pausanias (IV, 31, 9) during his visit in the ancient city of Messene.

The temple was built after Epameinondas refounded the city in 369 BC. The site was systematically excavated between 2006 and 2013 and revealed numerous finds. The presentation offers an overview of the material evidence from the excavation, that includes pottery, hundreds of terracottas and miniature vases, mostly hydriskai, inscriptions, metal finds and the cult statue. The detailed study of the above finds offers insights into the character of the worshiped deity and allow us to reconstruct ritual practices that were taking place continuously from the early Hellenistic to the Roman period. It also reveals a deity responsible for the well-being and growth of vegetation, animals and people, mostly young women, and raises the question of her identification.

In this presentation I will discuss all the indications that lead to the revision of the deity worshiped, based not only on the finds from the excavation in the sanctuary but also from the other sanctuaries in the city as well as on the topography, i.e. the location of the temple inside the fortification wall but away from the city center together with the shrine of Zeus Ithomatas on the mountain's summit and the neighbouring sanctuary of Artemis Limnatis.

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