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Ritual burials of temples and ritual depositions accompanying building activities in the oracle sanctuary of Apollon at Abai/Kalapodi

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Katja Sporn | Alexandre Farnoux |
Eric Laufer
ANCIENT PHOKIS

Athenaia 13
Études méditerranéennes 4

DEUTSCHES ARCHÄOLOGISCHES INSTITUT
Abteilung Athen

ATHENAIA 13

ÉCOLE FRANÇAISE D'ATHÈNES

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MÉDITERRANÉENNES 4**

DEUTSCHES ARCHÄOLOGISCHES INSTITUT
Abteilung Athen

Katja Sporn | Alexandre Farnoux | Eric Laufer (eds.)

ANCIENT PHOKIS

New approaches to its history, archaeology
and topography

International Conference, DAI Athens, 30 March – 1 April 2017

REICHERT VERLAG

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Ritual burials of temples and ritual depositions accompanying building activities in the oracle sanctuary of Apollon at Abai/Kalapodi

Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier

Most of the important Greek sanctuaries were excavated in the pioneer years of Greek archaeology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with large groups of workmen and without precise observance of the stratigraphy and find contexts. Therefore it is a lucky circumstance that the oracle sanctuary of Apollon of Abai¹ near the village of Kalapodi, although visited as early as 1676 by the English traveller George Wheler² and in 1805 by William Martin Leake³, remained – with the exception of a small trial excavation by Georgios Sotiriadis in 1905⁴ – unexcavated until 1973. The modern meticulous methods used in the excavations under the directorships of Rainer C. S. Felsch (1973–1982) and the author (2004–2013) made possible in both sequences of temples, the northern and the southern ones, the observation of rituals accompanying building activities as well as ritual burials of temples as rarely identified before.

Felsch made an exciting, at that time unique discovery within the sequence of the north temples: A small makeshift temple which had been built into the ruin of the Archaic north temple, together with the Archaic south temple destroyed by the Persians in 480 B.C.⁵ This small temple, in front of which a forecourt of 4 m length was situated, had a width of 5.50 m, and a length of at least 8.80 m⁶. The walls consisted of mudbricks above a foundation of re-used limestones, among them column drums cut in half⁷. In the temple, 2 m behind the entrance door, a rounded altar of rough stones covered by a layer of clay for burning sacrifices came to light, and next to it a block of poros limestone⁸, near the southeast corner of which a bronze statuette of Apollon serving as a provisional cult image was fixed in a socketing of lead⁹.

Soon after the completion of the makeshift temple, the building of the foundations of the large Clas-

¹ Earlier identified as the sanctuary of Artemis Elaphebolos of Hyampolis: Ellinger 1987; Felsch – Siewert 1987, 681–684; and the book titles of Jacob-Felsch 1996, Felsch 2007a. For the corrected identification as to the oracle sanctuary of Apollon of Abai, see Niemeier 2008a, 302 f.; Niemeier 2016a, 3–5; Prignitz 2014; Kopanias forthcoming.

² Wheler 1682, 463.

³ Leake 1835, 187.

⁴ Σωτηριάδης 1906, 144 f.; Felsch 2007b, 26 f.

⁵ For the Persian destruction, see Felsch et al. 1980, 84 f.; Felsch 2007b, 16; Niemeier 2016a, 20 f. For the makeshift temple, see Felsch et al. 1980, 85–99; Felsch 2007b, 19 f.

⁶ See the plan Felsch et al. 1980, fig. 66 following p. 86.

⁷ Felsch et al. 1980, 87 fig. 68.

⁸ Felsch et al. 1980, 88–90 figs. 69–72.

⁹ Felsch et al. 1980, 90–92 figs. 73–75; Felsch 2007c, 54 f. 259 f. no. 118 pl. 7.

sical North Temple I was started, the floor of which was planned to be laid 2.30 m higher than that of the makeshift temple¹⁰. When the foundation of the cella of the new temple was standing in full height as a rectangular frame, the makeshift temple and its forecourt were situated in a pit. In a second phase the foundation of the adyton was inserted and cut the makeshift temple in the middle, but the cult was still continued in its eastern half¹¹.

When the floor of the new temple was laid out, the makeshift temple was ritually buried. First votive offerings were deposited at different places: on a votive bench at the eastern edge of the forecourt a group of iron objects, a sword, four spearheads, skewers and some tools¹², between the south wall of the provisional temple and the foundation of the south wall of the cella of the Classical North Temple a bronze cup, several iron objects – a sword, six spearheads, a spear shoe and a knife –, a biconical sling stone and a round grinding stone¹³, and inside the temple on the poros-limestone block a bronze stand with three lion's feet, 14 bronze rings, five bronze pins and one iron pin, an iron skewer, a Phocian obolos minted between 457 and 445 B.C., and two objects of clay, a female terracotta bust and the figurine of a cock¹⁴. The three last objects have a clear funeral connotation and had – according to Felsch's convincing interpretation – their function within a ceremony of ritual burial of the makeshift temple¹⁵. At the end a sacrificial fire was ignited and afterwards the bronze statuette and the votives on the poros-limestone block were buried under mudbricks, the lower sides of which were hardened by the heat¹⁶.

At the time of its discovery, the ritual burial of this makeshift temple was a completely unique and unparalleled case. However, three more examples of

ritual burials of temples as well as evidence for rituals accompanying building activities came to light in the sanctuary of Abai/Kalapodi in the new excavations from 2004 to 2013 under my directorship, during which the number of succeeding south temples was completed to 11 ranging from the Mycenaean period of ca. 1400 B.C. to the Roman Imperial period of the 2nd century A.D.¹⁷

The first of these cases is that of the Mycenaean South Temple 1, built around 1400 B.C. (Late Helladic IIIA 1) and destroyed for unknown reasons towards 1300 B.C. (at the end of Late Helladic IIIA 2), a rectangular building of 4.50 m width and at least 9 m length with the walls constructed of mudbricks on a foundation of rough stones and enclosing the remnants of an altar and of a stone platform for animal sacrifices¹⁸. On the destruction level numerous objects of types such as we also find in Mycenaean graves were deposited: many beads of glass, fayence, rock crystal and serpentine as well as at least 27 seal stones of serpentine, fluorite, glass and agate¹⁹. Originally they were probably more numerous, since there are many disturbances by later pits and large parts of the level in question are covered by later walls and could not be excavated.

The seal stones show ornamental motifs²⁰ as well as representations of animals, cattle and goats²¹, animals which were also sacrificed in the Mycenaean sanctuary of Abai Kalapodi²². An exceptional lentoid of agate has the representation of a demon, commonly called ›Minoan Genius‹, carrying a sacrificial animal, a goat²³.

The second case is that of the Geometric South Temple 6, constructed in the first half of the 8th century B.C. of mudbricks on a foundation of rough stones²⁴. It was ritually buried and demolished towards the

¹⁰ Felsch et al. 1980, 87.

¹¹ Felsch et al. 1980, 87 f. figs. 66. 69.

¹² Felsch et al. 1980, 96 figs. 66. 81. 83; sword: Schmitt 2007, 501 f. 550 no. 461 pl. 103; spearheads: Felsch et al. 1980, 430 f. 526 no. 13 pl. 69; 440 f. 534 no. 160 pl. 79; 448 f. 538 nos. 227. 228 pl. 84.

¹³ Felsch et al. 1980, 97 figs. 66. 82; cup: Felsch 2007b, 234. 376 no. 2161 pl. 60; sword: Schmitt 2007, 498. 549 no. 437 pl. 101; spearheads: Schmitt 2007, 436. 530 no. 83 pl. 74; 437 f. 532 no. 110; 439. 533 no. 134 pl. 77; 439 f. 533 no. 136 pl. 77; 440 f. 534 no. 156 pl. 90; 440 f. 535 no. 167 pl. 80; spear shoe: Schmitt 2007, 468. 543 no. 336 pl. 91.

¹⁴ Felsch et al. 1980, 89 f. figs. 71. 72; bronze stand: Felsch 2007c, 237 f. 379 no. 2196 pl. 61; bronze rings of type A I (Felsch 2007c, 174 f.); Felsch 2007c, 316 no. 998 pl. 41; 323 f. nos. 1188. 1229 pl. 42; 328 nos. 1325–1335 pl. 44; bronze pins: Felsch 2007c, 92. 272 no. 248 pl. 23; 101 (type group IX). 277 no. 332 pl. 26; 114 (type B IV). 284 no. 425 pl. 28; iron pin: Felsch 2007c, 116 f. (type group F). 285 no. 434; coin: Felsch et al. 1980, 90; terracotta bust: Felsch et al. 1980, 92–94 figs 73. 76; terracotta cock: Felsch et al. 1980, 94 fig. 77.

¹⁵ Felsch et al. 1980, 95 f.

¹⁶ Felsch et al. 1980, 96 figs. 79. 80.

¹⁷ Niemeier 2016a, 7–23.

¹⁸ Niemeier 2016a, 7 f. pls. 2, 2. 3. Plan colour pl. Ib; Niemeier 2017, 324. 336 figs. 2. 3.

¹⁹ Niemeier 2016a, 8 f.; Niemeier 2017, 324 f. The find spots are marked on the plan Niemeier 2016a, colour pl. Ib = Niemeier 2017, 336 fig. 2.

²⁰ For instance: Niemeier 2011, 98 fig. 6, first and second seal from the left; Niemeier 2012, 95 fig. 9, third seal from the left.

²¹ For instance: Niemeier 2011, 98 fig. 9, third and fourth seal from the left; Niemeier 2012, 95 fig. 9, first and second seal from the left; Niemeier 2016a, 9 pls. 3, 1. 2.

²² The animal bones from the new excavations are being studied by N. Benecke, Berlin; for those of the earlier excavations s. Stanzel 1991.

²³ Niemeier 2016a, 9 pl. 3.3.

²⁴ Niemeier 2016a, 14 pl. 5, 2 colour pl. III a; Niemeier 2017, 328. 340 fig. 10.

1 Exploded amphora, sword and obelos in the entrance of South Temple 6, from southwest



2 Weapons in front of the north wall of South Temple 6, from north



end of the 8th century B.C. because it had to give way to a larger successor with probably different function. For the ritual burial with burning, firewood was scattered on the floor and between the antae. On it many votives were deposited and a sacrificial fire emblazed. The fire burnt also the primitive wooden cult image in the shape of a plank which we found fallen and broken in front of its limestone base²⁵. An amphora filled with olive oil and set next to the entrance served as accelerant and exploded with the fire (*fig. 1*). Among the votives were numerous pins of bronze and

iron, necklaces with beads of bronze and faience, fibulae, and pendants in the shape of a ram, of birds and wheels²⁶. Moreover, weapons were laid down in the temple: behind the entrance a sword of the Naue II type with a skewer lying at a right angle above it (*fig. 1*), and in front of the north wall an entire collection of weapons: twelve iron swords of the Naue II type, six of them with the points to the west, the other six with the points to the east, five iron spearheads, a bronze shield buckle and a burnt wood bow (*fig. 2*). The same types of objects as deposited as

²⁵ Niemeier 2011, 99 fig. 8; Niemeier 2016a, 14 pl. 5,3 colour pl. IIIa; Niemeier 2017, 328. 340 fig. 11.

²⁶ See the plans Niemeier 2010, 107 fig. 7; Niemeier 2016a, colour pl. IIIa = Niemeier 2017, 340 fig. 10. Most of the pins are of Felsch's 2007c, 90–97. 271–274 nos. 231–289 pls. 23. 24 type IA1. The fibulae are spectacle fibulae of Felsch's 2007c, 138 f. 290 f.

nos. 503–515 pls. 31. 32 type B.II (following Kilian 1975, 146). The ram pendant is illustrated in Niemeier 2008a, 303 fig. 511; Niemeier 2008b, 102 fig. 7. The bird pendants are of the types defined by Felsch 2007c, 67–75. 263–267 nos. 147–178 pls. 20. 21. The wheel pendants are of Felsch's 2007c, 63–65. 262 f. nos. 19 pl. 19, type I.



3 Deposition of adze and bird pendant

votives on the floor of South Temple 6 were in the same period placed as offerings into the burials of human beings, personal ornaments in those of women²⁷, swords and spears in those of men²⁸.

A find of particular interest was uncovered in the southeast corner of South Temple 6: a North Syrian bronze bowl with the representation of a round dance of men²⁹. With it our sanctuary belongs to the few sanctuaries of international significance – like Delphi, Olympia and Samos – in which oriental luxury goods were offered as votives as early as in the 8th century B.C.³⁰

After South Temple 6 had been burnt out, its mudbrick walls were torn down inside, first the north wall, then the south wall, and the area was levelled to form a floor for the new building, South Temple 7. With a width of 6 m and a length of 29 m, this apsidal building, again with mudbrick walls on a foundation of rubble stones, was much larger than its predecessor³¹. And apparently it was not any more a temple in the proper sense. We did not find evidence for the existence of a cult image, instead it had a pi-shaped inner building measuring 3.25 m by 1.65 m which, as I think, had a function in connection with the oracle, probably as the

seat of it³². The importance of South Temple 7 is underlined by its decoration with wall-paintings in the middle of the 7th century B.C., of which parts of a combat scene are preserved³³.

There was a row of wooden pillars in the centre of South Temple 7, one of which was especially emphasised: in front of the inner building, at a distance of only 38 cm, a rectangular limestone block with a flat raised octagonal base for a wooden pillar was placed³⁴. For placing the block, of which later only the octagonal base above was visible, the rest being covered by the clay floor, a pit was dug into the mudbrick debris of South Temple 6. Before the block was put in place, a foundation sacrifice was carried out in the pit: barley, lentils, broad beans, peas, olives and mallows were burnt in it³⁵, and two Late Geometric bronze pendants, one in the shape of a ram³⁶, the other in that of a bird³⁷, which had probably been unearthed during the excavation of the pit, were thrown into the fire. After the block had been placed, the stone mason smoothed the outer edges with an iron adze which he left together with another bronze bird pendant as an offering after having finished his work (fig. 3)³⁸.

Ca. 580 B.C. the sanctuary suffered a heavy fire destruction in which both temples were destroyed³⁹. The agents of this destruction were probably the Thessalians, who invaded Phocis in the early 6th century B.C. and imposed an oppressive foreign rule for about a century⁴⁰. After the destruction several votives, spearheads, and pins were laid down on the overturned mudbrick walls of South Temple 7. A small fireplace next to two spearheads provides evidence for ritual activities (fig. 4).

For the continuation of the cult and oracle until a new south temple was built, a short-lived makeshift complex was established above the ruin of South Temple 7⁴¹. For this the inner building of South Temple 7 was re-built with mudbrick walls on the old

²⁷ See, for instance, the contents of a woman's tomb of the late 8th cent. B.C. from Amphicleia exhibited in the hall of the Bronzes Kaparanou in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens: Λουκά 2011, 1029 fig. 4.

²⁸ See for instance the swords and spearheads from the Geometric tombs below the Heraion of Eretria: Bérard 1970, 16 f. nos. 6, 11–17 fig. 3 pls. 9, 10 figs. 37, 39, 42; 19 f. nos. 9, 3–7 fig. 8 pl. 9 fig. 38, 10 fig. 43.

²⁹ Niemeier 2016a, 15 pl. 6, 1 a–b; Niemeier 2016b, 234 fig. 1, a, b. Niemeier 2020.

³⁰ See Niemeier 2016b.

³¹ Niemeier 2016a, 15–17 colour pl. IIIb.

³² See Niemeier 2016a, 16.

³³ Niemeier et al. 2012; Niemeier 2016a, 17 pl. 6, 3.

³⁴ Niemeier 2010, 106 f. fig. 5; Niemeier 2016a, 16 pl. 7, 1; Hellner 2011, 228–232 fig. 2.

³⁵ The plant remains are being investigated by E. Margaritis.

³⁶ Niemeier 2010, 107 fig. 6.

³⁷ Of Felsch 2007c, 69 f. 264 f. nos. 156–163 pl. 20, type II.

³⁸ Hellner 2011, 229–231 fig. 4; Niemeier 2016a, 16 pl. 7, 2. For the type of the adze, which probably was also used for working the wooden pillar (Hellner 2011, 231), see Baitinger – Völling 2007, 18 f. 21 f. cat. nos. 25–28 pls. 4, 5. The bird pendant is of Felsch's 2007c, 71 f. 266 nos. 175, 176 pl. 21 type V, variant 2.

³⁹ Niemeier 2016a, 18. Evidence for the date of the destruction is provided by Middle Corinthian pottery found in the destruction level (see Felsch 1996, 232 f.): Braun 1996, 239 no. 15 pl. 49 (north temple); Felsch 1987, 17 fig. 30 = Braun 1996, 227, 260 f. pls. 52, 56 (south temple).

⁴⁰ Lehmann 1983.

⁴¹ Niemeier 2016a, 18; plan colour pl. IV a.



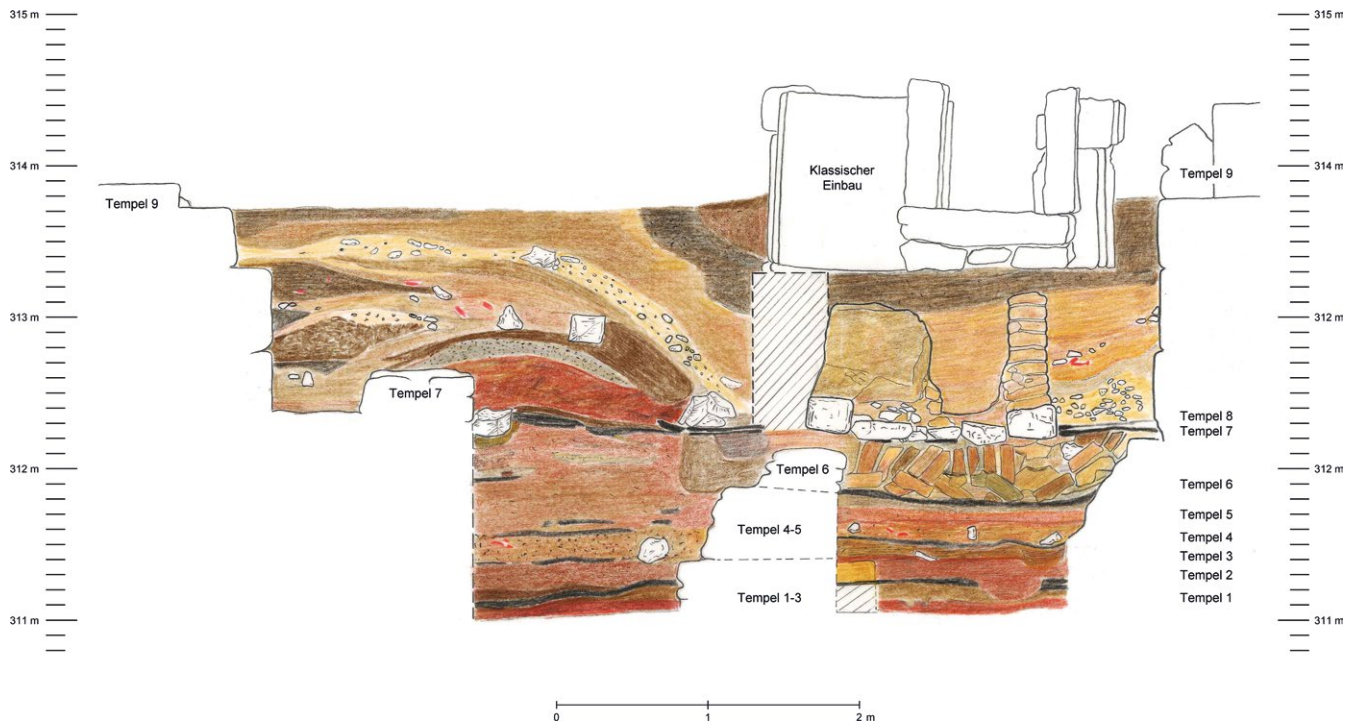
4 Two spearheads and a small fireplace to the right of them on the fallen north wall of South Temple 7, from north



5 South Temple 8 (left), two plastered pits in front of it, bronze omphalos bowl deposited beside the northern (rear) one, from southeast



6 Plan of the makeshift sanctuary with South Temple 8 (scale 1:100)



7 West section of South Temples 1-9 (scale 1:50)



8 The small wall surrounding South Temple 8 with ribbed bronze bowl in front of it, from northeast



9 Iron cross pick axe in situ in the filling of the terrace for South Temple 9



10 Iron double axe in situ in the filling of the terrace for South Temple 9

foundations but as a free-standing building, South Temple 8⁴². The original pi-shape open to the east was closed by an east wall with a small door. In front of it were two offering pits lined with white plaster⁴³ and an open courtyard, in which a re-used Doric capital, which had belonged originally together with five more, unstratified capitals to an unidentified building, possibly a stoa, was sunken into the mudbrick debris of South Temple 7 to serve as an altar⁴⁴.

Before filling up a terrace of ca. 1 m height for the new South Temple 9 the makeshift sanctuary was ritually buried: In the east many votives were deposited around the capital and burnt in a sacrificial fire: bronze ›krikoi‹ (cast rings)⁴⁵, fibulae and a shield, iron

spearheads, skewers, knives, a curved knife for cutting off the meat from the bones, and a meat fork. The latter objects had probably been used before at a ritual meal connected with the burial ceremony.

At the northernmost of the two pits in front of South Temple 8 apparently a last libation from a bronze omphalos bowl was performed. After it, the priest deposited the bowl upside down beside the pit (fig. 5). In the southern pit, already excavated in 1982 by Felsch, numerous votives were deposited: 56 bronze rings and 26 bronze krikoi as well as glass beads and the ivory eye of a statue⁴⁶. Three early Late Corinthian kotylai provide a date of the filling of the pit ca. 570/560 B.C.⁴⁷

⁴² Niemeier 2016a, 18 pl. 7, 1. 4.

⁴³ Niemeier 2016a, 19 pl. 7, 4.

⁴⁴ Hellner 2015; Niemeier 2016a, 18 pl. 7, 3.

⁴⁵ For krikoi and their function s. Felsch 2017c, 175–177.

⁴⁶ Felsch 1987, 17 f with n. 32a; Felsch 2007c, 176; Niemeier 2016a, 19 fig. 6, 4.

⁴⁷ Felsch 1987, 17 f. figs. 32. 33; Felsch 1996b, 233; Braun 1996, 258 no. 169 pl. 55. 260 nos. 179–181 pls. 51. 56.

During the filling up of the terrace for South Temple 9 the small South Temple 8 was kept open as long as possible. For this a small wall of fieldstones surrounding it on three sides was constructed (*fig. 6*). Next to that, a ribbed bronze bowl was deposited (*fig. 8*). Then the filling of the terrace for the new temple, containing levels of limestone split from the working of the foundation blocks of the latter, was dumped gradually in sloping levels against the narrow wall (*fig. 7*) to keep the makeshift sanctuary open

for ritual acts as long as possible. In the levels of the filling, iron working tools were deposited by the stone masons as votives, among them a shaft hole axe (*fig. 9*)⁴⁸ and a double axe (*fig. 10*)⁴⁹. These tool types had a long tradition. Very similar ones are to be seen in the exhibition on traditional stone working in the folkloristic museum of Gavalochori Apokronas in Crete.

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⁴⁸ Cf. Weber 1944, 168 pl. 73g.

⁴⁹ Cf. Baitinger – Völling 2007, 14–16 cat. nos. 9–12 pls. 2. 74.

Sources of illustrations: *Fig. 1:* D-DAI-ATH-ARCHIV-GA-KAL-DF-2007-A_0301 (W.-D. Niemeier). – *Fig. 2:* D-DAI-ATH-ARCHIV-GA-KAL-DF-2009-A_0530 (W.-D. Niemeier). – *Fig. 3:* D-DAI-ATH-ARCHIV-GA-KAL-DF-2009-A_0500 (W.-D. Niemeier). – *Fig. 4:*

D-DAI-ATH-ARCHIV-GA-KAL-F-01-0019 (W.-D. Niemeier). – *Fig. 5:* D-DAI-ATH-ARCHIV-GA-KAL-DF-2009-A_0201 (W.-D. Niemeier). – *Fig. 6:* Zeichnung N. Hellner und B. Niemeier, Digitalisierung H. Birk. – *Fig. 7:* Zeichnung B. Niemeier, Digitalisierung H. Birk. – *Fig. 8:* D-DAI-ATH-ARCHIV-GA-KAL-DF-2013-A_0040 (W.-D. Niemeier). – *Fig. 9:* W.-D. Niemeier. – *Fig. 10:* D-DAI-ATH-ARCHIV-GA-KAL-F-03-0325 (W.-D. Niemeier).

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Zusammenfassung – Abstract – Περίληψη

Rituelle Bestattungen von Tempeln und rituelle Ablagerungen im Baugeschehen im Orakelheiligtum des Apollon in Abai/Kalapodi

Zusammenfassung Da das Orakelheiligtum des Apollon von Abai nahe dem neuzeitlichen Dorf Kalapodi Phthiotidas nicht in den Pionierjahren der griechischen Archäologie im späten 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert ausgegraben wurde, haben moderne und akribische Ausgrabungsmethoden bei den 1973 begonnenen Ausgrabungen die Identifizierung von mit den Bauaktivitäten verbundenen Ritualen ermöglicht, wie sie zuvor nur selten beobachtet worden sind: die rituelle Bestattung von Tempeln, die Niederlegung von Votiven auf zerstörten Tempeln sowie die Bauaktivitäten begleitende Opferung von Werkzeugen.

Schlagwörter Votivniederlegungen, zerstörte Tempel, Opferung von Werkzeugen, Bautätigkeit, Abai/Kalapodi

Ritual burials of temples and ritual depositions accompanying building activities in the oracle sanctuary of Apollon at Abai/Kalapodi

Abstract Because the oracle sanctuary of Apollon of Abai near the modern village of Kalapodi Phthiotidas had escaped excavations in the pioneer years of Greek archaeology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, modern meticulous excavation methods used in the excavations that began in 1973 have made the identification of rituals connected with the building activities possible in ways rarely observed before: The ritual burial of temples, depositions of votives on ruined temples, as well as the offerings of tools accompanying building activities.

Keywords votive depositions, destroyed temples, offerings of tools, building activities, Abai/Kalapodi

Τελετουργικές ταφές ναών και τελετουργικές αποθέσεις στο πλαίσιο των οικοδομικών δραστηριοτήτων στο ιερό μαντείο του Απόλλωνα στις Άβες/Καλαπόδι

Περίληψη Επειδή του ιερό μαντείο του Απόλλωνα στις Άβες κοντά στο σύγχρονο χωριό του Καλαποδίου Φθιώτιδας έχει διαφύγει των ανασκαφών στα καινοτόμα χρόνια της ελληνικής αρχαιολογίας κατά τον ύστερο 19ο και πρώιμο 20ό αιώνα, χρησιμοποιήθηκαν σύγχρονες σχολαστικές ανασκαφικές μέθοδοι στις ανασκαφές που ξεκίνησαν το 1973, οι οποίες έκαναν δυνατή την αναγνώριση των τελετουργιών που συνδέονταν με οικοδομικές δραστηριότητες και που είχαν παρατηρηθεί σπάνια μέχρι σήμερα: οι τελετουργικές ταφές των ναών, οι αποθέσεις των αφιερωμάτων στους κατεστραμμένους ναούς, και οι προσφορές εργαλείων που συνόδευαν τις οικοδομικές δραστηριότητες.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά αφιερωματικές αποθέσεις, κατεστραμμένοι ναοί, προσφορές εργαλείων, οικοδομικές δραστηριότητες, Άβες/Καλαπόδι