

Spiritual continuity and architectural transformations at Larisa's (Aeolis) sanctuary 'on the rocks'

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Abstract

The major sanctuary in the ancient city of Larisa (Aeolis) consists of structures built at different periods -an altar, a small *oikos*-temple, a stoa, and a propylon- all constructed on the highest spot of the acropolis on solid bedrock. The architectural remains of the sanctuary, dated between the 7th and 4th centuries BCE and are mostly preserved at the foundation level. During the 20th century excavations, "a rectangular building with a hearth inside" was found under the temple which is believed to date back to the Early Bronze Age. Another arrangement made of circular stone features with a *baitylos* and other large rocks is thought to have been part of cultic practices, presumably related to the Mother Goddess. The Archaic-Greek temple and its dependencies were built on the Bronze Age core articulation of the acropolis. The prehistoric cup-marks and the small finds are associated with the cult of Mother Goddess/Cybele to indicate the cult continuity.

In numerous sanctuaries, which became widely known during the Archaic period in Western Anatolia, cult activities can be uninterruptedly traced back to the "pre-Greek" periods. Furthermore, most urban sanctuaries were deliberately chosen to be located at the highest rocky point of the settlement and dominate the surrounding areas. Besides the sacredness of the cult place, its visibility was likely to have been another essential consideration. Questioning the influence of these parameters in determining the location of the primary sanctuary in Larisa requires a comprehensive assessment in conjunction with the original context of the settlement.

Keywords

Bronze Age, Cult continuity, Larisa, Rock cult, Temple.

1. Introduction

The ancient city of Larisa (Buruncuk) is located the south of the ancient region of Aeolis, in Menemen in northern İzmir Province. The settlement remains, which spread over a 2 km area from the volcanic Sardene (Dumanlı) Mountain to the southeast, dominate the Hermos (Gediz) Valley. The Hermos River flows south of the settlement, connecting this ancient region with inland Lydia to the east and the Aegean Sea to the west.

The settlement layout of Larisa comprises two hills and their surrounding areas (Figure 1). The higher hill in proximity to Dumanlı Mountain (Larisa East) is primarily distinguished by a powerful fort and a small urban area. The lower hill towards the west (Larisa West), situated at about 100 m above sea level, consists of an acropolis on the hilltop, residential areas on the southeast and northern slopes, and an extensive necropolis on the north, northeast, and east slopes. The acropolis itself encompasses a partially artificial area covering 800 square m, which is predominantly characterised by numerous rock clusters encircling the hill. The sanctuary is located within the rocky area at the top of the hill, furnished with representation buildings on the descending slope towards the west. The acropolis was fortified by monumental defensive walls since the Bronze Age.

The settlement history of Larisa can be traced back to the Neolithic period, with the earliest archaeological findings dating to the Late Neolithic-Early Chalcolithic era [1]. Throughout the Bronze Age, Larisa was continuously inhabited, particularly becoming prominent during the Early Bronze Age as indicated by small finds and architectural remains. In 20th century publications, these early layers are categorised as the “pre-Greek period”, further separating finds into two distinct periods [2]. The earliest architectural remains are located beneath the temple, along with a hearth containing ceramic finds. From the second period, the most evident architectural remains are a fragment of the fortification wall and a cult complex with circular stone features discovered within the temple

area. Despite the scarcity of remains and limited research, the Bronze Age settlement of Larisa exhibits similarities to settlement models of that period, with its well-defined upper, lower and outer settlements, as well as the emphasis on central power (Külekçi, 2021b, p. 301). The archaeological findings dating from the 2nd millennium to the 9th century BCE are scant in both the settlement and sanctuary (Özdoğan, 2018, p. 127). Although remarkable finds from the 8th and 7th centuries BCE exist, the visible architectural remains are predominantly dated from the 7th to the 4th centuries BCE. During the early 5th century, Larisa and its rule were probably under Persian power. Subsequently, Larisa remained under Athenian rule for a while in the second half of the 5th century, followed by continued suzerainty to the Persians. The abandonment of Larisa is thought to have occurred during the Galatian invasions at the beginning of the 3rd century BCE (Boehlau & Schefold, 1940, p. 42).

The earliest excavations in Larisa were carried out in 1902 by Lennart Kjellberg (Uppsala) and Johannes Boehlau (Kassel) (Mater, 2013, pp. 34-36). However, due to the impact of World War I and prevailing economic difficulties, the second campaign was delayed until 1932. Three excavations were undertaken until 1934, after which the excavations stopped completely because of insufficient financial resources (Hellström, 2003, p. 239). Excavations were focused primarily on the acropolis in Larisa West, including five trial trenches in the urban area and a group of grave units. The results of the excavations were gathered in the well-known *Larisa am Hermos* publications of 1940 and 1942 [3].

Between 2010 and 2021, an architectural survey was carried out under the direction of Turgut Saner [4]. The intensive research has revealed that the settlement area on a ca. 2 km long ridge was furnished with diverse urban, extra-urban, and rural functions. The architectural documentation of the temple, altar, and stoa was carried out as part of the field studies. In addition to the fieldwork, various research projects and theses, examining the archi-

tectural remains in the sanctuary, were conducted.

The primary purpose of this article is to question the parameters thought to be important in determining the location of the Archaic sanctuary at Larisa, such as cult continuity, the holiness associated with a natural element (bedrock), and the visibility of the cult place. To contextualise the findings, an examination of the ongoing discussions about the establishment of Greek sanctuaries is essential. It will be considered in a comparative context whether these parameters exhibit similarities with other cult sites in Western Anatolia. Furthermore, it aims to research the “Greek” identity of the sanctuary while demonstrating its tangible relationship with Bronze Age culture.

2. The “Greek” sanctuary of Larisa

The main sanctuary of Larisa is situated on a rock cluster southeast of the acropolis and atop the highest point of the Larisa-West (Figure 2).

The *temenos*, which is located on a nearly two-meter slope decreasing from northeast to southwest, covers approximately one-third of the fortified area. The main components of the sanctuary consist of the temple and altar in the centre, the stoa on the north, the propylon on the east, the Northeast Building on the northeast and two cisterns on the southwest (Figure 3 and Figure 4). Although the structures, which do not all belong to the same construction program, have been significantly damaged, they are preserved at the foundation level.

The sanctuary witnessed numerous construction and renovation activities during different periods. An *oikos*-shaped temple measuring 7.50 x 4.25 m was built towards the end of the 7th century BCE. Based on the scanty remains, it is suggested that a 1.70 m wide terrace was constructed around the *naos* of the first temple. Although no architectural remnants have been discovered, small finds indicate that a

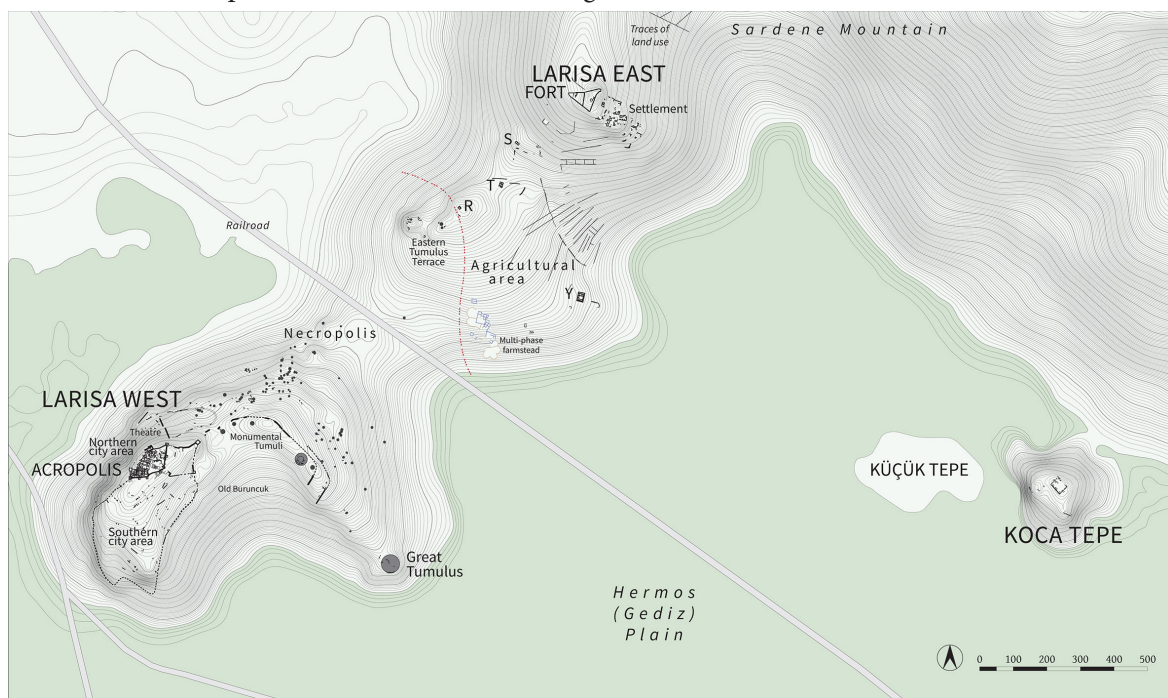


Figure 1. General settlement plan of Larisa (Buruncuk) (Külekcı, 2021a).



Figure 2. Larisa West on Hermos Plain, view from south (Larisa Architectural Survey Archive).

partly natural, partly levelled rock was used as an altar on the east side of the temple (Boehlau & Schefold, 1940, pp. 68-69). During the same construction program, a structure presumed to be a stoa was built to the north of the temple and altar. Moreover, the *temenos* must be surrounded by a *peribolos*, consisting of a partly natural and partly constructed rocky terrace (Boehlau & Schefold, 1940, p. 24).

Around 530 BCE, extensive renovation and construction was carried out on the sanctuary. The temple was enlarged while maintaining the same orientation and proportions as the first *naos*, describing a rectangular arrangement measuring 13 x 7.48 m. The foundation of the enlarged *naos* was constructed with stronger, more elaborately worked walls. Furthermore, a

U-shaped foundation was built around this arrangement, consisting of different-sized blocks, a weak outer shell, and a loosely filled inside, which all indicate significant repairs. Only the stone beddings of the outer walls/steps of the altar have been preserved on the bedrock. These traces indicate that the structure, with its dimensions of approximately 7.25 x 6.50 m, could be considered “monumental” in comparison to the temple.

During the 5th century BCE, a terrace was created by adding a retaining wall to the west of the temple. Concurrently, the area surrounding the temple was organised, a wide ramp was constructed to the south, and limestone slabs were paved to the east and north. The construction of the propylon and the Northeast Building and the destruc-

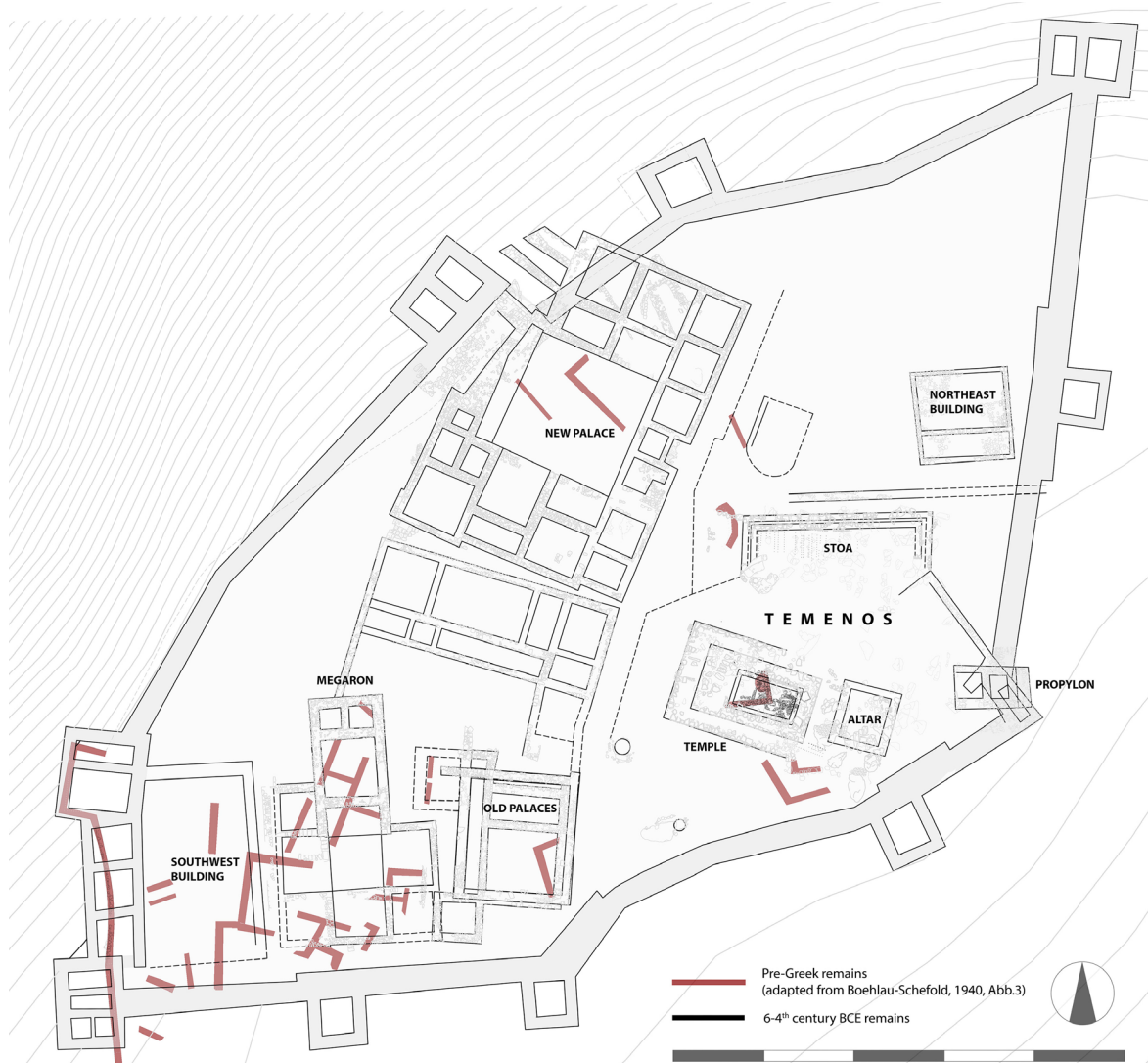


Figure 3. Plan of the acropolis with buildings dating between 6th to 4th centuries BCE (Larisa Architectural Survey Archive) and “pre-Greek” remains of lower levels (adapted from Boehlau & Schefold, 1940, Abb. 3).

tion of the late Archaic fortification walls were included in the same construction program (Boehlau & Schefold, 1940, pp. 34-36). Although some buildings were renovated, it is thought that there were no major changes in the *temenos* after this period.

The sanctuary is accepted to be dedicated to Athena due to the votive amphora that was inscribed carefully with the goddess's name, discovered in the northern part of the *temenos* (Boehlau & Schefold, 1940, pp. 57-60). However only this find, which is arguably weak, supports this assumption. According to 20th century publications, the cult of Athena held significant importance in Troas and Aeolis, thus making this cult a plausible suggestion for Larisa (Boehlau & Schefold, 1940, p. 22). There are also numerous female figurines with

polos from the Archaic period raising the possibility that the Mother Goddess/Cybele cult might have been worshipped in Larisa (Boehlau & Schefold, 1942, Table 6). Additionally, the terracotta Cybele relief dated to the late 4th century BCE also makes it clear that this cult retained its significance even at much later periods (Öztürk, 2018, pp. 313-315).

3. The sanctuary in the Bronze Age

The earliest architectural remains at Larisa, underneath the first *naos* of the temple, were excavated to the bedrock during the 20th century excavations. The remnants found at three different levels were suggested to belong to three distinct phases (Boehlau & Schefold, 1940, pp. 57-58). The remains of the first period consist of a L-shaped



Figure 4. Larisa West, *temenos* (Larisa Architectural Survey Archive).

wall with one or two stone layers and the “hearth”-shaped arrangement in the middle resting directly on a rock cluster (Figure 5) [5]. The wall course with an east-west orientation measures approximately 3.60 m, and the southern course is 5 m in length. The excavation publication defined the remains as an *oikos* or megaron that functioned as the “ruler’s house” accessed from the west (Boehlau & Schefold, 1940, pp. 57–58). The cultural layers that were not destroyed by a later votive (?) pit, a pile of yellowish terracotta brick (?) fragments, belonging to the superstructure of the “Megaron,” emerged atop the bedrock. Above that layer, a blackish-ashy soil containing ceramic fragments from the second phase was found. The second phase of the “cult area” is defined by the rock formations around the temple (Figure 4). Near the southeast corner of the “Megaron,” an unworked block is situated atop an oval-shaped pile of stones. Additionally, a second

circular feature was found beneath the south wall of the *naos*. A pavement-like arrangement of small stones is located towards the easternmost part of the *naos*. The rocky formations are suggested to have been used in cultic rituals due to the large amount of ashy soil (Boehlau & Schefold, 1940, pp. 58–59).

Another oval-shaped stone arrangement, attributed to a third period, was found atop the pavement-like remains (Figure 5). It carried a large boulder that was about 1.40 m long, 0.70 m wide, and 0.75 m high, and it occupied the central axis of the Archaic *naos* [6]. This area is likely to be a continuation of the cult area, with the unhewn standing-stone (*baitylos*) presumably holding special significance for the cult. Around the Archaic temple and “pre-Greek” cult area, cup-marks were found hewn into outcrops of bedrock that were associated with libations or rain magic practices related to the Mother Goddess/Cybele (Boehlau &

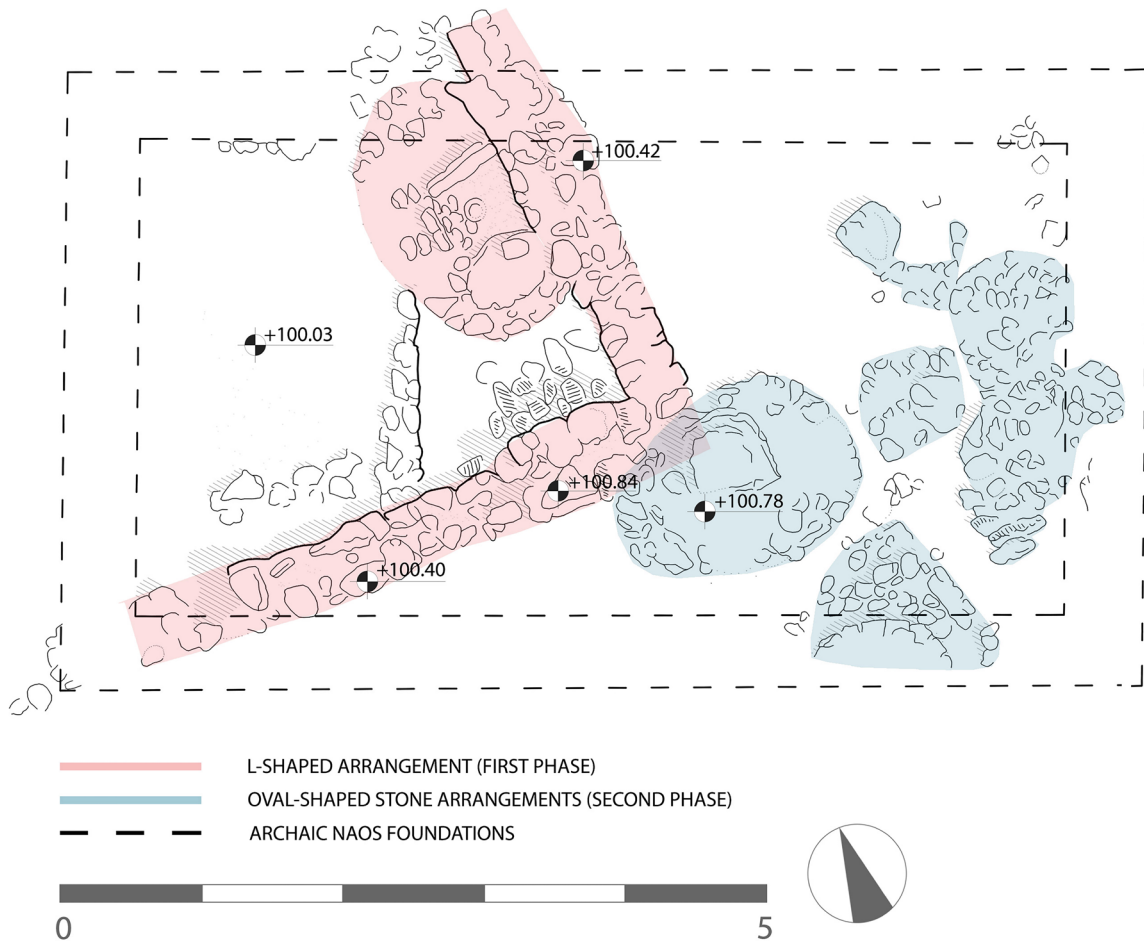


Figure 5. L-shaped plan fragment and walls with curved courses under Archaic naos (adapted from Boehlau & Schefold, 1940, Abb. 34a).

Schefold, 1940, p. 59). Cup-marks in Larisa, typically 15-20 cm in diameter and round in shape, are found especially in the south of the sanctuary (Figure 6). At the highest point of the area, where the Archaic altar was located, a rectangular stele hole measuring 0.66 x 0.27 m and 0.30 m deep was found to the northeast of the levelled rock clusters. Again, on the same rocky terrace, “pre-Greek” remains were revealed among the traces of the Archaic altar (Boehlau & Schefold, 1940, p. 24).

In summary, the vicinity of the “Greek” temple in Larisa constituted the pre-Greek nucleus of the upper city with a specialised -possibly religious-structure. The same area was transformed into a sacred centre surrounded by walls during the Middle Bronze Age (Külekçi, 2021a, p. 36). The finds indicate that the cult area was used extensively until the end of the Bronze

Age, though the exact purpose of the use is not clear. Although, there is limited information about the periods between the Late Bronze Age and the 9th century BCE, the fact that the same area was rebuilt with sacred attributes during the Archaic period provides questions about cult continuity or recognizing the old cult area in memory.

4. The evolution of “Greek” sanctuaries

In recent years, there have been many discussions about the development/evolution of early Greek sanctuaries. In the 1970s, studies highlighted a sudden and significant increase in the number of sanctuaries around the 8th century BCE (Coldstream, 1977; Hägg, 1983; Snodgrass, 1971). Archaeological evidence indicates that this transformation may represent population growth or the unification

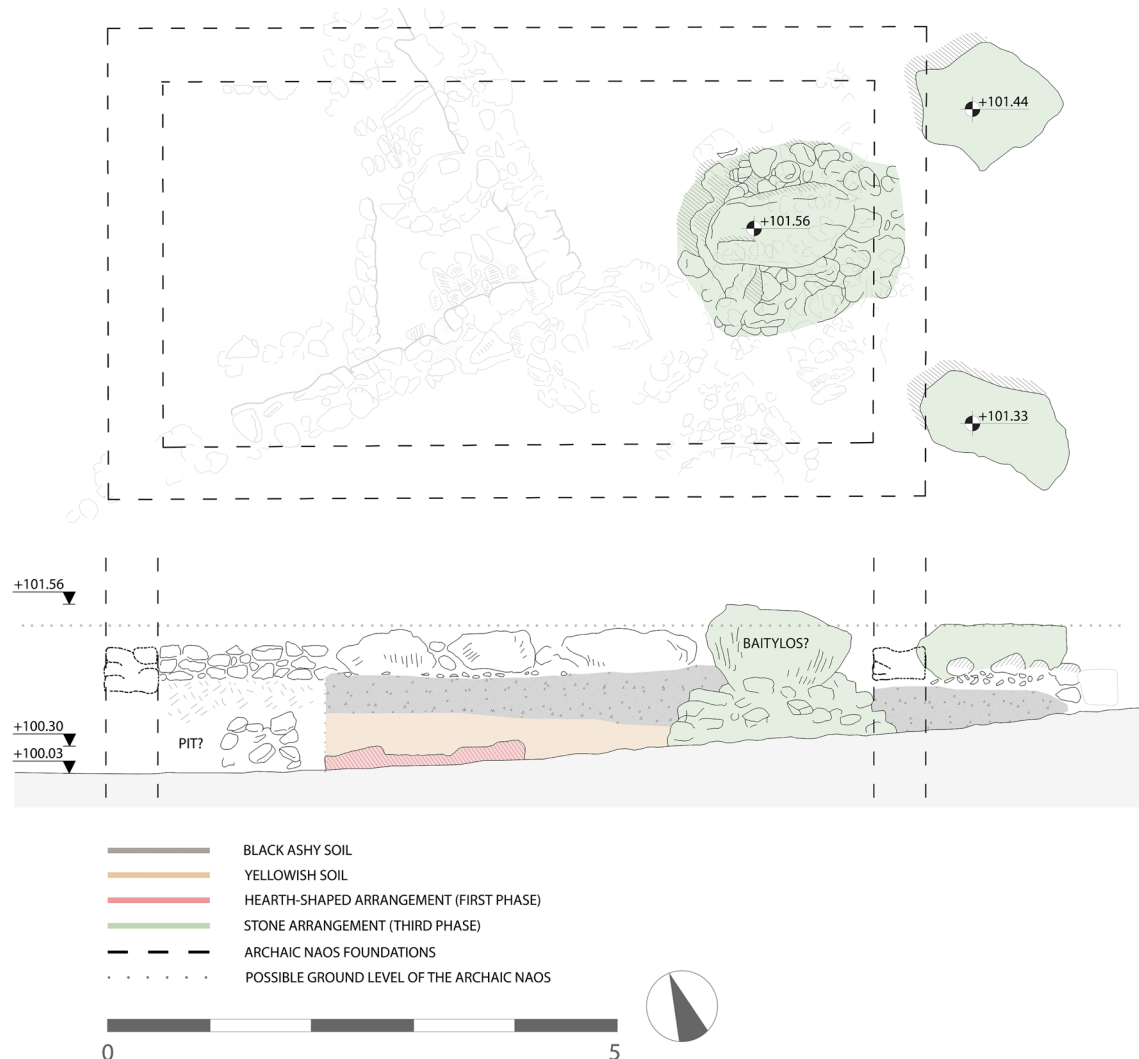


Figure 6. Plan of the stone arrangement and section of the “pre-Greek” remains (adapted from Boehlau & Schefold, 1940, Abb. 34b, Abb. 35b).

of diverse communities around centres (Bintliff, 1977, pp. 131–133; Eren, 2019, p. 228).

De Polignac established connections between the development of the Greek “polis” and sanctuaries (1984; 1995). He presented a *polis*-first model and suggested that the Greek sanctuaries emerged in the 8th century BCE. According to De Polignac, constructions that were expansive, large, and monumental, such as sanctuaries, needed a group of individuals with the capacity to provide organization, administration, financial resources, and labour (De Polignac, 1995, p. 13; Susmann, 2019, p. 20). However, this type of hierarchical and authoritarian centralised organization could not be observed in the Geometric and Archaic periods, but rather emerged with the Classical period (Malkin, 1996, p. 79–80; Polignac 2006, p. 205). Morris, who believes that from the second half of the 8th century BCE, the “Greek” sanctuary and also the relationship between

sacred space and the domestic living space changed (1987, p. 189). While admitting that there are examples of shrines that were separated from the settlement in the 10th and 9th centuries, these examples are very rare. Instead, he claims that cult activities were predominantly domestic.

In contrast, more recent scholarship has hypothesised that there are few examples of sacred architecture from and before the 8th century BCE due to the scarcity of research (Sourvinou-Inwood 1993, pp. 1–9). Mazarakis-Ainian states that the small-scale buildings, which were separated from the settlements as ruler’s dwellings, served both public and cultic purposes in the Early Iron Age (Mazarakis-Ainian 1997, pp. 340–396). In these structures, which feature hearths and benches, evidence of ash, burnt animal bones, and votive objects is frequently found. Indeed, in addition to their role as a sacred space for the worship of the god/goddess and housing the cult statue and valuable



Figure 7. Examples of cup-marks from the temenos.

offerings, they also served as the *hes-tiatorion*, where ritual meals are eaten (Mazarakis-Ainian, 1988). Marinatos argues that there was no distinct or homogeneous architectural type that could be described as a “temple” or an architectural development that evolved from Bronze Age architecture. Due to their modest dimensions, Marinatos suggests that rectangular structures with hearths are banquet structures appealed to only the elites. In some regions, these structures served as the ruler’s dwellings as well as the cultic needs of the community (1993, pp. 179-180).

The increase in recent excavations, surveys, and publications in Western Anatolia draws different perspectives on early settlements and sanctuaries. Settlements such as Phokaia, Miletos, Troy, Ephesos, and Smyrna have continuity from the Bronze Age [7]. The founding dates of the cities go back much further back than what is recorded in ancient sources, indicating that the so-called Greek *polis* may, in fact, be the continuation of the settlements with the local peoples of Anatolia (Eren, 2018, p. 228). Additionally, there are ongoing discussions about the extent and reality of the “Greek migrations,” which are frequently mentioned in ancient sources and widely accepted in modern studies [8].

Evidence indicates that starting in the Bronze Age, sanctuaries became distinct from residential areas, with specialised structures or arrangements dedicated to cult activities. The continuity was not limited to settlements but also extends to sacred areas. Cult areas, such as those found in Troy, Phokaia, and Kalapodi, were used for the same purpose from the Bronze Age to the “Greek” period, even though there might have been changes in the cult practices. As a result, the focus of evaluating the development of the “Greek sanctuary” moved away from the concept of the “Greek *polis*” and towards “cult continuity” [9]. The major determinants in the location of sanctuaries now emphasize respecting old sacred areas, the sanctity derived from natural features, or the visibility of the cult area (Eren, 2015, p. 226).

5. Determining the location of the sanctuary

5.1. Cult continuity

The Archaic temple at Larisa was constructed on a rocky area (*baitylos* and its surroundings) to replace the Bronze Age cult area. The *baitylos* was believed to have been the central axis of the Archaic *naos*. The 20th century publications/researchers refer to the foundation of the *naos* as filled with boulders, possibly belonging to the old cult area (Boehlau & Schefold, 1940, p. 59). However, the relationship between the rock arrangement and the Archaic temple remains uncertain. It is possible that the *baitylos*, which protrudes 50 cm from the foundation of the temple, was visible in the first phase of the temple (Figure 5). Among the “pre-Greek” finds at Larisa, a few Mycenaean and, in very small fragments, Geometric period pottery was found. Based on these finds, the continuity of settlement in Larisa after the “Aeolian migration” was emphasized in the excavation publication (Boehlau & Schefold, 1942, p. 4). It has been suggested that Larisa was inhabited by the “Pelasgians” and destroyed by the Aeolians around 700 BCE (Boehlau & Schefold, 1942, p. 4). Although this theory is widely accepted and supported by archaeological finds and ancient sources, it remains controversial (Boehlau & Schefold, 1940, pp. 6-11). Therefore, it is possible that the area was used with low intensity or abandoned after the Bronze Age. In both cases, sanctity from the Bronze Age persisted, and its significance lasted until the Archaic period.

In numerous Aegean settlements that have been thoroughly examined, evidence of cult continuity can be discerned. The Temple of Athena and its surroundings, located near the theatre port in Miletos, are where the Bronze and Iron Age settlement developed (Greaves, 2002, p. 105). The temple was constructed atop the Mycenaean (?) walls, incorporating a piece of fortification wall. Additionally, an area referred to as the “Megaron” is found within the vicinity, where terracotta figurines and offering bowls have been discovered (Eren, 2017, p. 110; Niemeier & Niemeier, 1997, p. 196).

In Ephesos, around Artemision, in the Ayasuluk and Panayırdağ regions, there are two fortified settlements that were inhabited starting in the 2nd millennium BCE (Treziny, 2006, pp. 243-245). Situated in close proximity to the sea, Artemision also stands atop a hill at the mouth of the river (Kerschner, 2006, p. 366, pp. 378-379, Fig. 3). Although the plain on the hill is somewhat obscured by levelling and frequent new constructions, it is recognised as the initial location of the cult and the central point of the sanctuary [10]. The topographic reference of this location served as the orientation for all subsequent temples in later periods (Kerschner & Prochaska, 2011, p. 76). In the 7th century BCE, a cult building (*Naos 1*) was constructed to the west of the area where Late Bronze Age finds were unearthed. The dedication to the sanctity of the place must be the reason behind temples being consistently built on the same spot for centuries (Kerschner & Prochaska, 2011, p. 123).

The Sanctuary of Athena at Phokaia is one of the most extensively excavated and published sanctuaries around Larisa. The ceramic finds indicate that the rocky hill and its surroundings, where the temple is situated, were utilised as a sanctuary since the 3rd millennium BCE (Özyiğit, 1998, p. 773). To the west of the Sanctuary of Athena, six distinct oval temples were found, which dated between the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE and the Protogeometric period (Özyiğit, 2019, p. 52). Beneath the Temple of Athena, an open-air cult area associated with the worship of the Mother Goddess was found, revealing numerous libation pits. It is thought that the open-air cult place was moved to the Harbour Sanctuary during the construction of the Temple of Athena in the 7th century BCE. The Harbour Sanctuary dedicated to Cybele is located on the rock clusters overlooking the sea, where the northern podium of the temple sits and served the cult uninterruptedly from the Bronze Age to the Greek period (Özyiğit, 2019, Plate 487).

In the “Western Sanctuary” of Troy, there is a multi-unit building known as the “Terrace House” dated to the Late

Bronze Age (Troy VIIa). Ritual activity may have occurred within an elite household context, in which bronze figurines, ceramic bull figurines, ceramic and glass beads, spindle whorls, grinding stones, mortars, and fenestrated stands might have been utilised (Aslan, 2018, pp. 247-248). Cultural and religious changes occurred during the Early Iron Age, and while cult practices changed, the religious function remained (Aslan, 2018, pp. 249-250). During the Protogeometric period, the population decreased, and the settlement area was abandoned. However, archaeological findings indicate that people were preparing food, eating, and drinking for cult practices near the ruins of the Terrace House and the LBA Citadel Wall (Aslan, 2018, pp. 256-257). A cult building was constructed using the walls of the “terrace house” in the Geometric period. Additionally, at least 28 stone circles were found on a platform located next to the Late Bronze Age wall about 4-5 m above the ground level of the Geometric Cult Building. The stone circles are associated with hero cults, and the ash remains and numerous ceramic vessels indicate that rituals such as banquets or libations were held (Aslan, 2018, p. 266).

The cultural layers revealed that the Athena sanctuary at Klopei was continuously occupied until the end of the Late Bronze Age. Near the Archaic temples A and B several small oval structures, which were dated to the 12th century BCE were discovered (Rougou & Douloumpakis, 2014, pp. 26-29). The earliest sacred structure in the sanctuary was discovered to the north of Temple B. The oval-shaped building that faced west and oriented east-west was dated from the 8th century BCE. Numerous votive objects, including a clay idol head, a mule head, copper jewellery, bronze knives, bronze arrowheads, and others, were found in a circular arrangement inside the building and thought to have a cultic context (Rougou, 2014, pp. 30-36).

Apart from these examples, in many settlements the Greek period sanctuary located on the Bronze Age or Iron Age remains, such as at sanctuary of Athena at Assos, Heraion at Samos, Chios Kato Phana, Klaros Apollon, and

Smyrna Athena [11].

The concept of cult continuity, as observed in various examples, entails two distinct aspects: the continuation of the sanctity of an area that was sacred at earlier dates, or an old settlement/remain being considered sacred in a later period and subsequently assuming a cultic role. It is debatable whether both aspects imply the same phenomenon, and which counts as cult continuity. However, the uninterrupted use of an ancient sanctuary with a cult function does not necessarily entail the cult and rituals remain unchanged. Even if the Bronze Age cult in Larisa was associated with the Mother Goddess, it remains uncertain whether it persisted precisely the same as the Archaic Mother Goddess cult. It is known that some rituals were abandoned in the Classical period, and cultic arrangements (cup-marks) remained under the ramp built to the south of the temple. Similarly, the open-air cult area, consisting of *baitylos* and surrounding rocks, changed during the Archaic period, with the construction of the temple. In Larisa, even if the cult did not change completely, the cult practices might have changed. Although the Aeolian migrations are controversial, the change in the cult practices suggests a different or socio-culturally altered community.

5.2. Sacred natural features: Rock

In both Anatolian and Greek sanctuaries, it is common to find a natural focus, such as a tree, stone, spring, or cave (Sourvinour-Inwood, 1993, p. 8; Scully, 1962, p. 44). The sanctuary in Larisa is situated atop a natural rock at the highest point of the hill, which likely played a significant role in selecting this area as a cult place. Cup-marks and unhewn standing stones dating to the Bronze Age indicate that the area was arranged as an open-air cult site dedicated to the Mother Goddess (Boehlau & Schefold, 1940, p. 59). However, rocky sanctuaries are found in extensive context, raising questions about whether they were arranged specifically for a particular god or goddess.

In Hittite and Urartian cults, rock cults associated with mountains, rocky

terrain, and high hills held sacred significance allowing for interaction with the gods (Roller, 2013, p. 65, p. 82). The most prominent aspect of the Phrygian Mother Goddess, Cybele, is her connection with mountains, wilderness, and wildlife (Roller, 2013, p. 25). Representations of the Mother Goddess cult typically include carved steps, niches, statues, reliefs, standing stones, and cup-marks. Indeed, while there are cult areas in the mountains dedicated to the Mother Goddess, no structure akin to a “temple” dedicated to her has been discovered dating to the Bronze or Iron Ages (Roller, 2013, p. 105, p. 235).

In Larisa, the presence of cup-marks in the cult place is associated with the cult of the Mother Goddess. The cup-marks, typically round or oval shapes carved into the rock, are frequently found in many Late Bronze Age settlements across Anatolia and are linked to libation rituals, supported by textual and iconographic evidence (Luke & Roosevelt, 2017, p. 13). Cup-marks appear in different contexts and across a broad geography. They are found at entrances to citadels and buildings in various sites such as Troy, Kaymakçı, and Boğazköy [12]. Additionally, they are encountered at burial sites, along roads, and on processional routes. Numerous specimens can be found carved into rocky areas with expansive landscapes for cultic purposes. In Sirkeli, on the bedrock plateau above the relief carved into the rock are at least two cup-marks (Hawkins, 2015, p. 3). Likewise, above the rock relief at Fraktin are cup-marks in varying sizes extending in a line for at least 30 m (Ussishkin, 1975, p. 86). In Kaymakçı, numerous cup-marks were found in the rocky area extending along the northeastern slope within the citadel and overlooking Marmara Lake (Luke & Roosevelt, 2017, p. 6). On Kızbacı Hill, cup-marks are also hewn into outcrops that protrude from the hillside and overlook the mountain and the spring in the valley. Furthermore, two cup-marks were found carved on the open-air sanctuary at Yazılıkaya (Ussishkin, 1975, p. 91). In the rocky area of the Athena sanctuary of Phokaia, which served as a sanctuary of the Mother Goddess from the

3rd millennium BCE to the Archaic period, there are numerous libation pits and cup-marks associated with the cult (Erdoğan, 2018, pp. 136-140). Similarly, cup-marks were found in Alinda, along with a stele hole carved into the same bedrock and a cyclopean wall, all of which are considered parts of the sanctuary (Erda, 2020, pp. 49-50).

At Larisa, the *baitylos* and the surrounding rocks, along with the stele hole, must be related to the same cult. In the 2nd millennium BCE, there was a belief in Anatolia, Syria, and the Eastern Mediterranean that rocks and stones were the residence of gods (Darga, 1969). The unhewn stones arranged in a standing position were considered cult images symbolizing the sacred being (Korfmann, 1998, pp. 373-377). Hittite texts reveal that these stones, known as “*huwaši*” in the Hittite cult, were washed, cleaned, and offered sacrifices and libations (Darga, 1969, p. 499). In places where there is no temple or in open-air sanctuaries, *huwaši* and *baitylos* serve as an altar (Darga, 1969, p. 502.; Yaman, 2013, p. 102). The most concrete evidence revealing the existence of *huwaši* stones are the unhewn pedestals in Boğazköy and the standing stones in the open-air sanctuary in Kuşaklı/Sarissa (Macqueen, 1986, p. 120; Collins, 2007, p. 54). Examples of similar context have been found in the sanctuaries of Knossos and Koumasa, the fortification gates of Troy, the road leading to the palace complex in Beycesultan, and the sanctuary at Gerga, although they date to a later period [13]. In the second century AD, Pausanias (1.44.2, 9.27.1, 9.38.1, 9.24.3) mentions numerous instances of unwrought stones (*argoi lithoi*), believed to be the earliest images of the gods. For Pausanias, aniconic stones are cult objects reflecting a different local tradition of the past, which were transmitted without overshadowing the figural cult statues (Gaifman, 2012, pp. 74-75). The cult associated with aniconic depictions of the gods indicates an ancient tradition in Anatolia that continued for a long time (Held, 2020, p. 485).

Examples of cup-marks and standing stones (*baitylos/argoi lithos*) found

in various regions suggest their association with nature-related festivals or cult activities. At the top of the acropolis in Larisa, standing stones are arranged in the oval stone structures, the stele hole carved into the bedrock, and the cup-marks display the similar rock cult. Indeed, the dating of the cup-marks to the 2nd millennium BCE aligns with the dating of the remains in Larisa.

5.3. Visibility

Larisa, which is described as “a hill settlement dominating the plain”, offers visibility from the surrounding plain and main roads (Külekçi, 2021a, p. 32). The positioning of the Archaic sanctuary atop the hill in Larisa implies that “visibility” could have been another factor in site selection. This pattern of locating sacred places strategically chosen to dominate the landscape can be observed across different geographical regions. The preference to worship in high and visible places dates back to the Bronze Age, where societies worshipped, lived, and ruled in these high, isolated, and hard-to-reach places (Susmann, 2019, p. 157). Open-air sanctuaries at crossroads, low hills, or mountain peaks provide strong evidence of the continuity of cult practices, even if the cult has evolved over the centuries (Eder, 2019, p. 45).

The physical attributes provided by such locations – being visually recognizable, standing strong and inaccessible, and having a dominant position – were also adopted in the new sanctuaries established by the “Greeks” in the following centuries (Susmann, 2019, pp. x-xi, p. 118). Notably, the erection of monumental temples dedicated to the deities within sanctuaries visible from afar at the highest point of the settlement was regarded as evidence of the establishment of the Greek *polis* (Snodgrass, 2000, p. 17). Similar qualities are emphasized in ancient sources, when referring to the locations of the acropolis sanctuaries (Eren, 2015, p. 224) [14]. In addition, temples appeared as the power and prestige element of the Greek city-states; consequently, their visibility may have assumed even greater signif-

icance (Marinatos, 1993, p. 180). With the Archaic period, sacred areas began to be represented with ostentatious structures where votive offerings were kept safely, attracted more worshippers, more visible than open-air places, and displayed the community's piety to the god (Baleriaux, 2015, p. 105). It is conceivable that arrangements, such as terraces or podiums, were constructed to increase the visibility of those buildings.

Each settlement marked its natural environment with specific social, political and economic factors that can influence the placement of sacred spaces (Baleriaux, 2015, p. 21). For instance, in settlements like Larisa, presumed to derive their sustenance primarily from agriculture, the strategic placement of the acropolis sanctuary on a hill overlooking the plain, can be assumed to be motivated by the intention to exert dominance over the hinterland. The surrounding landscape is controlled by a fortress in Larisa East, whereas the visibility of the temple area (actually the entire acropolis grounds) in Larisa West emphasizes a manifestation of the rulers' power.

6. Conclusion

In the majority of studies concerning the establishment of Greek sanctuaries, a standardised approach has been employed, encompassing "Greek" cities and sanctuaries across a broad geographical range from Sicily to Western Anatolia. Nevertheless, the influence of regional traditions and differences in scale should be expected at numerous sacred sites. Recent investigations have revealed significant disparities in material culture even between settlements located in the northern and southern regions of Western Anatolia (Pavúk, 2022, pp. 49–51). Hence, it becomes essential to consider these regions in conjunction with their respective environments and communication networks. At present, research on the prehistory of Aeolis and the northern region of Western Anatolia remains insufficient to provide a comprehensive assessment of the continuity of sanctuaries. The excavations conducted during the 20th century predominantly focused on the

"Greek" cultural layer. Nonetheless, contemporary studies have raised questions regarding the occurrence of large-scale Greek/Aeolian migrations and the level of "Greek" cultural presence within settlements in these regions (see endnote 8). The establishment of sanctuaries cannot be attributed solely to the "Greek" identity, as evidenced by examples such as Troy, Phokaia, and Ephesos which are located in the vicinity of Larisa. Instead, these sacred places maintained their characteristic sanctity over an extended period.

According to some perspectives, the worship of the Mother Goddess/Cybele is believed to have reached Western Anatolia during the Archaic period through the influence of Phrygia and Lydia (Roller, 2013, pp. 142–170; Marinatos, 2007, p. 353). However, the existence of the rock cult, which is thought to be the predecessor of the cult of Cybele and has similarities in terms of representation and religious practices in Western Anatolia, dates back to the Bronze Age. Indeed, the presence of a rock cult provides evidence that Larisa was influenced by significant cultures, such as the Hittites and Troy during the Bronze Age. Although it is debatable whether the cult evolved, it is essential to highlight that the cult persisted in the same location, maintaining a connection to the local Bronze Age cult area.

Although Larisa may not have held a prominent status as a significant city centre during the Bronze Age, it serves as an example of a developed settlement with distinct local characteristics and culture (Külekçi, 2021a, p. 36). Even during its most spectacular period in the Late Archaic/Early Classical era, Larisa, described as "rural" or "local", is not very different from the Bronze Age Larisa. Even though the information about Larisa's settlement characteristics from the 2nd millennium BCE to the Archaic period is limited, the few Mycenaean and Geometric period ceramics found in the "pre-Greek" finds may indicate that the occupation continued (Boehlau & Schefold, 1942, p. 4). However, stratigraphy does not have the ability to provide a definitive answer and should consider that

the finds not have been systematically documented. Since no excavations were carried out after 1934, the assessment of the settlement layers at Larisa is based on the observations made by 20th century researchers. Notably, ceramic finds and other small finds have to be reexamined in light of new information and discoveries. Therefore, it is debatable whether Larisa has concrete continuity from the Bronze Age to the Greek period based on the existing information.

Social and cultural memory likely played a significant role in forming the cultural and religious identity of the community, as evidenced by the continued use of the same cult area despite the ongoing debate about continuity. In addition, cultural memory may be preserved through concrete symbols such as ancient objects (*aide-mémoire*) or settlement/building remains (*lieux de mémoire*) (Assman, 2006, p. 8). The Bronze Age sanctuary at Larisa might have combined with local oral traditions to create a *lieux de mémoire* for the archaic settlement. The prominent physical location dominating the environment and the persistence of ancient cults could also be related to sociopolitical power. Establishing a tangible connection with an ancestral past arguably allows elites to legitimize their social status (Aslan, 2018, pp. 259-260, footnote: 284).

In conclusion, the Bronze Age sanctuary at Larisa, characterised by its local cults, remained a place of worship for an extended period without losing its “sacred” connotation(s). The strategic location of the sanctuary on a prominent and rocky hill likely contributed to its sanctity, allowing it to retain its importance over time despite changes in cults, cultures, and inhabitants. Throughout both the Bronze Age and the Archaic periods, this modest settlement benefitted from the advantages of its location and continued to be influenced by various cultures while preserving its distinct local and traditional characteristics.

Endnotes

[1] For the Prehistoric period of Larisa, see: Özdoğan, 2018, pp. 122-143; Boehlau and Schefold, 1940, pp. 3-22;

Külekçi, 2021a, pp. 33-36.

[2] In the 20th century, researchers classified the artefacts solely by comparison with Troy. The first phase is dated later than Troy II. The second phase were compared with Troy V (Boehlau & Schefold, 1942, p. 4). Current studies indicate that Troy II is dated between 2500-2350 BCE and Troy V dates between 2000/1950-1750 BCE (Blum, Theater & Thumm, 2014, p. 789). An earlier report by Blegen from the beginning of the 20th century places the dating of Troy II between 2600-2300 BCE and Troy V between 2050-1900 BCE (1937, p. 12), Külekçi, 2021a, p. 34.

[3] Boehlau and Schefold, 1940; Åkerström and Kjellberg, 1940; Boehlau and Schefold, 1942.

[4] The ITU survey was conducted between 2010-2021 with the permission of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism – General Directorate of Cultural Assets and Museums; and with the financial support of ITU (Project numbers 37267 and 33992). For detailed results and reports of the architectural surveys, see: Saner, Külekçi and Öncü, 2018; Saner, Külekçi and Mater, 2017; Saner, 2016. Besides the fieldwork, research carried out by ITU graduate students help create a solid picture of Larisa: Research history of Larisa based on archival documents (G. Mater, 2013), stone pieces of architecture kept in Istanbul (M. Arseven, 2013) and (F. Öztürk, 2016), the architecture of the Northeast Building (O. Yıldırım, 2018) and of the Propylon (E. Kapulu, 2018), and the agricultural area close to Larisa East (S. Kolay, 2020) have been completed as master's theses. The settlement structures of Larisa studied in Külekçi's doctoral dissertation (I. Külekçi, 2021a). Remains of ancient quarrying activities (G. Mater), the acropolis circuit (E. Denktaş), the so-called New Palace (D. Göçmen), the “Athena Sanctuary” (F. Öztürk), and the necropolis (O. Yıldırım) are currently being studied as doctoral theses.

[5] In the excavation publication, the arrangement is referred to as a hearth due to the presence of a clay layer on the floor that has been hardened by fire and exhibits a dark yellow colouration

(Boehlau & Schefold, 1940, p. 58.)

[6] In the excavation publication, this unhewn standing stone was referred to as the *baitylos*. Adjacent to the archaic *naos* foundation, towards the eastern corners, there are two additional blocks featuring flattened upper surfaces. About one-fourth of the height of all these blocks is surrounded by remnants from the “pre-Greek” era which were compared with those from Troy V.

[7] Phokaia: Özyiğit, 2003, p. 102; Miletos: Greaves, 2002, pp. 39-47.; Troya: Aslan, 2018, pp. 42-63; Ephesos: Büyükolancı, 2000, pp. 40.; Smyrna: Cook, 1958-59, pp. 9-10.

[8] For further discussions about Greek migrations: Arseven, 2013, pp. 5-17; Mac Sweeney, 2017, pp. 379-421; Mac Sweeney, 2022, pp. 72-78; Rose, 2008, pp. 399-430; Vaessen, 2014, pp. 1-78; Vlassopoulos, 2013, pp. 78-128.

[9] For further information about cult continuity: Cosmopoulos, 2014, pp. 401-427; De Polignac, 1995; Eder, 2019, pp. 25-52; Felsch, 1996; Morgan 1996; Whitley, 2001, pp. 137-140, Whitley, 2009, pp. 279-288.

[10] The first layer, primarily containing pottery and small finds dated to the 14th-13th centuries BCE, was overlaid with a second layer composed of thin clay and ash layers (Kerschner & Prochaska 2011, p. 76). The presence of clay protogeometric animal figures, miniature pots, terracotta figurines, and sacrificial animal bones in the second layer strongly indicates that this area was used for cultic activities. Forstentpointner, 2008, pp. 33-45.

[11] Assos Athena: Aslan and Rheidt, 2013, p. 195; Samos Heraion: Kouka and Menelaou, 2018, pp. 119-142; Chios Kato Phana: Beaumont, 2011, pp. 222-223; Claros Apollon: Akar Tanriver, 2009; Smyrna Athena: Cook, 1958-59, pp. 9-10.; Akurgal, 1983, p. 13.

[12] Troy: Korfmann, 1998, pp. 373-377; Kaymakçı: Luke and Roosevelt, 2017, p. 6; Boğazköy: Ussishkin, 1975, pp. 92-93.

[13] Knossos, and Koumasa: Nilsen, 1950, p. 258. Troy: Korfmann, 1998, pp. 374-377. Beycesultan: Lloyd and Mellaart, 1965, pp. 28-29. Gerga: Held, 2020, pp. 485.

[14] Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, III. 8. 10.; Platon, *Leges*, 778c.; Aristoteles, *Politics*, 1331b.

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