Excavations at the Sanctuary of Zeus on Mt. Lykaion

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The Sanctuary of Zeus on Mt. Lykaion in Arcadia was well known in antiquity as the site of a famous Pan-Arcadian and Pan-Mediterranean athletic festival. Numerous ancient authors mention the cult of Zeus and some authors describe the sanctuary itself (see below). Pausanias describes the open-air altar of Zeus and thrones at the southern peak of the mountain (1,780 m. alt.) and the lower mountain midway (1,380 m. alt.) with buildings and monuments and a sanctuary of Pan. Greek mythology places the birthplace of Zeus on a ridge of Mt. Lykaion at Cretea. In 1811 Abel Bucur visited the site and published drawings of the temple of the hippodrome, bath, and other structures (below left). In the late 19th and early 20th century excavation was undertaken at both the upper and lower sites by the Archaeological Society of Athens under the direction of K. Karamanou and K. Konstantinou. At the southern peak of the mountain was found buried ash, bones, ashes, small bronze tripods and coins. In the nearby tombs were found a series of miniature bronze figures including Zeus and Hermes (see below) and two large column bases and a miniature bronze eagle. In the lower sanctuary were found remnants of a theater, several fountain houses, seats, statue bases (see digital terrain model), right. A second fountain house was located halfway between the two areas. The Mt. Lykaion Excavation and Survey Project, 2006-2015, is a multidisciplinary scientific project supported by the Greek-American research initiative to further explore the origins and history of the sanctuary. These are many facets to our project including topographical survey, architectural documentation, excavation, cultural resource management, geological survey, geophysical survey and regional historical studies. This presentation relates only to the first four categories of our work.

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PAUSANIAS, DESCRIPTION OF GREECE

In his "Description of Greece", a fifth-century AD guidebook, Pausanias describes the site of the sanctuary of Mt. Lykaion, noting its importance as a meeting place for Pan-Arcadian and Pan-Mediterranean athletes. He mentions the altar of Zeus and two thrones at the southern peak of the mountain, as well as buildings and monuments at the lower site. Pausanias also provides a brief description of the nearby tombs, which were excavated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bibliography

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