

# EXCAVATIONS AT THE SANCTUARY OF ZEUS ON MT. LYKAION



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 PREHISTORIC AND CLASSICAL ANTIQUITIES, SPARTA UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE AMERICAN SCHOOL OF CLASSICAL STUDIES AT ATHENS

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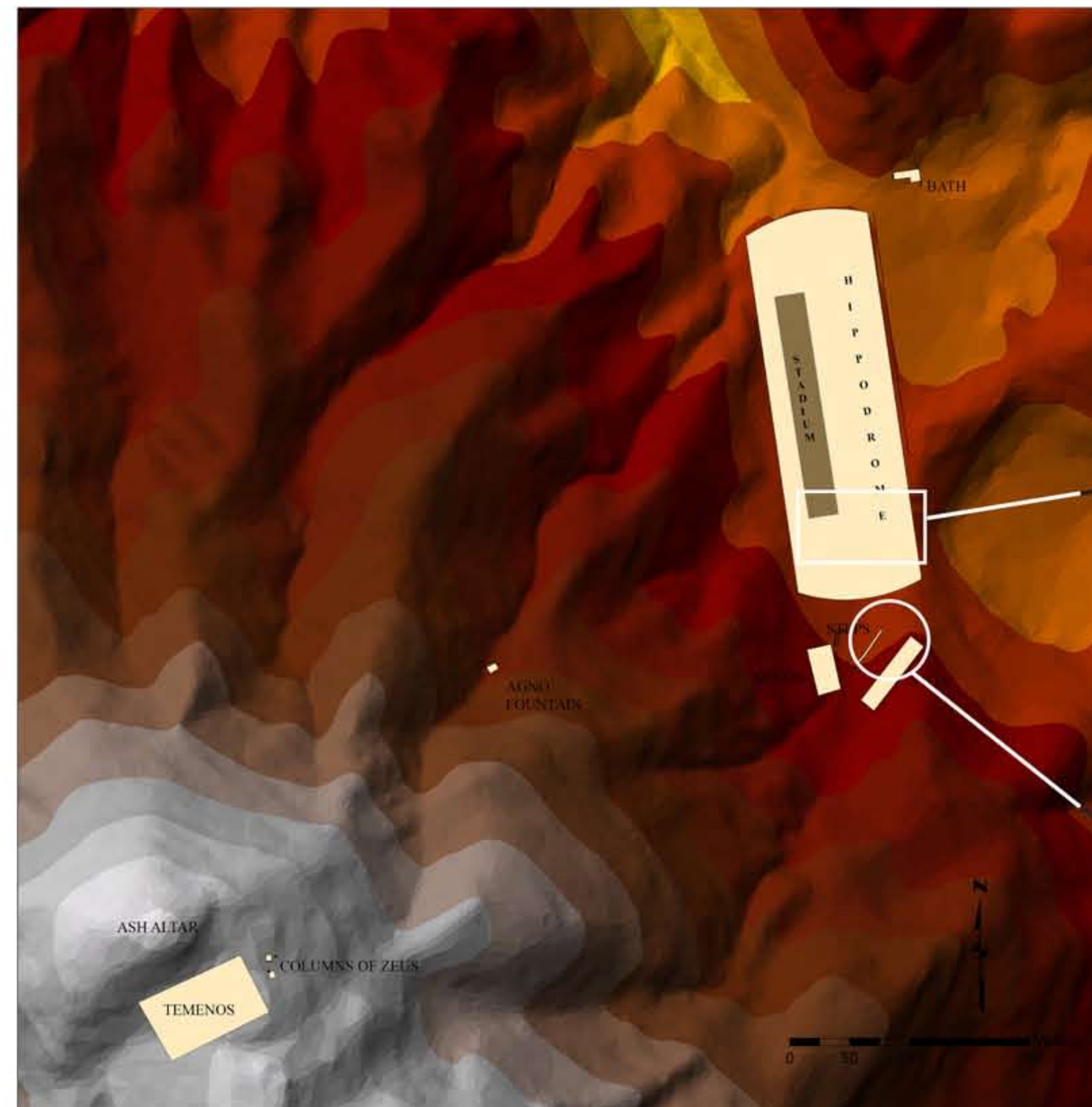
**The Sanctuary of Zeus on Mt. Lykaion in Arcadia** was well known in antiquity as the site of a famous Pan-Arcadian and Pan-Hellenic athletic festival. Numerous ancient authors mention the cult of Zeus and some authors describe the sanctuary itself (see below Pausanias) including the open air ash altar of Zeus and temenos at the southern peak of the mountain (1380 m. asl) and the lower mountain meadow (1180 m. asl) 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 1831 Abel Blouet visited the site and published drawings including the plan 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 areas by the Archaeological Society of Athens under the direction of K. Kontopoulos and K. Kourouniotes. At the southern peak of the mountain was found burned ash, bones, tiles, small bronze tripods and coins. In the nearby temenos were found a series of miniature bronze figurines including Zeus and Hermes (see below) and two large column bases and a miniature bronze eagle. In the lower sanctuary were found the remains of a stoa, xenon?, fountain house, seats, statue bases (see digital terrain model, right). A second fountain house was located half way between the two areas. **The Mt. Lykaion Excavation and Survey Project, 2004-2010**, is a multidisciplinary scientific Greek-American research initiative to further explore the origins and history of the sanctuary. There 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.



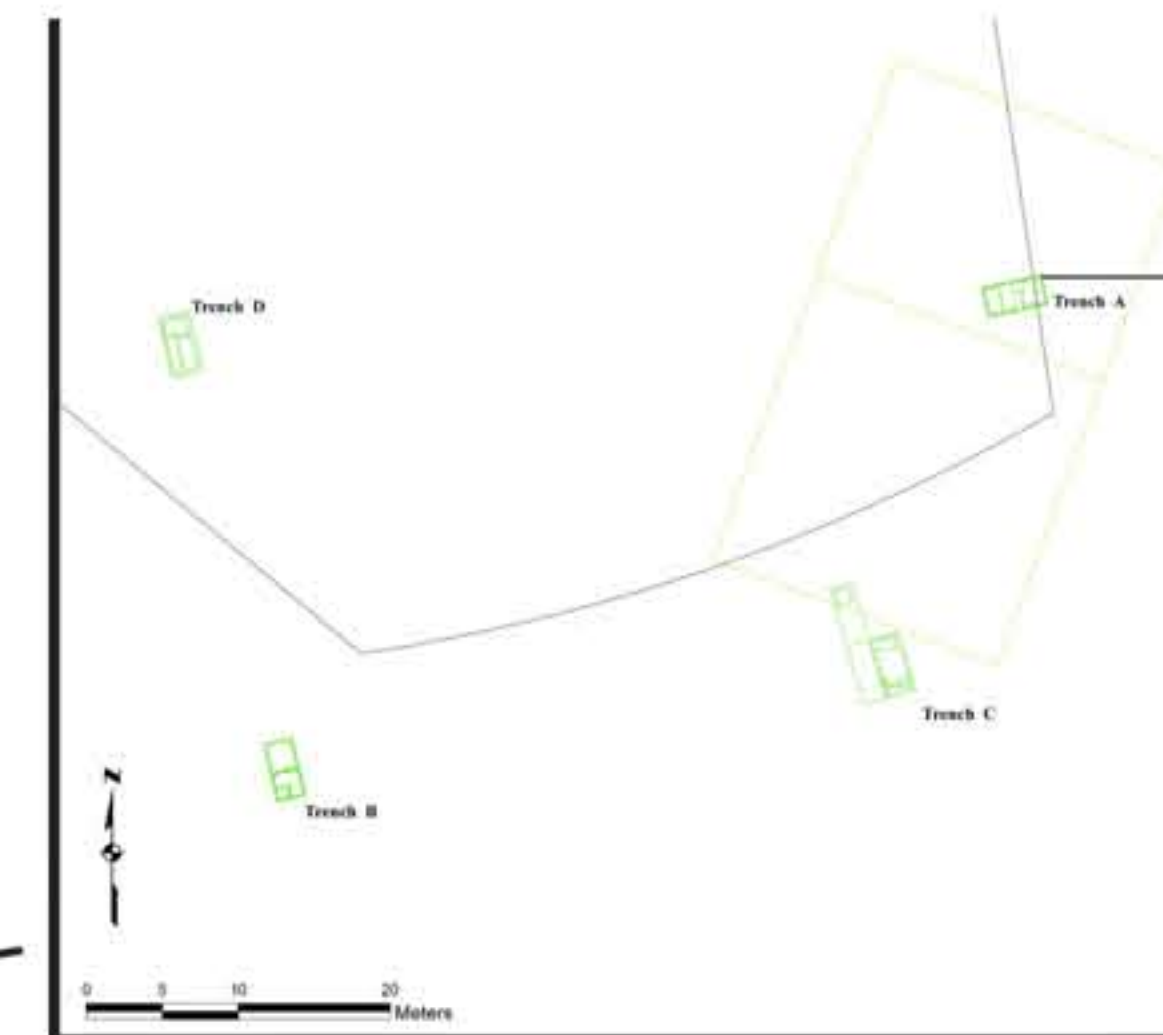
Abel Blouet, plate of hippodrome at Mt. Lykaion, Expédition scientifique de Morée, 1831



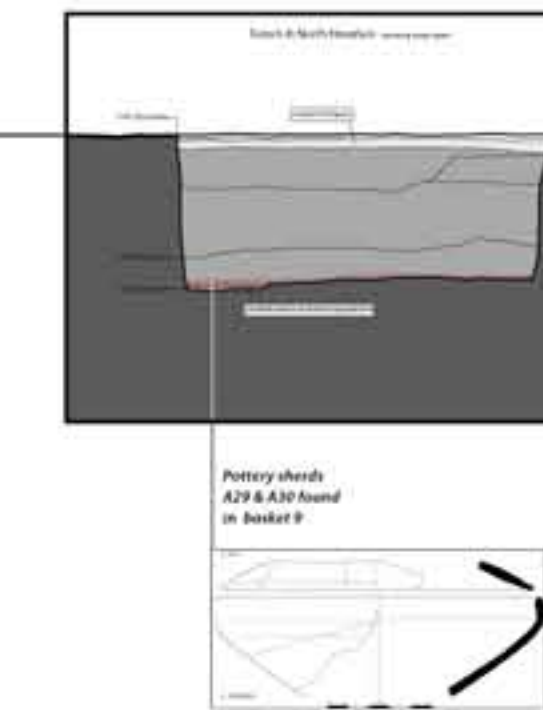
Ash altar of Zeus, the southern peak of Mt. Lykaion, with temenos in the foreground during excavation by K. Kourouniotes, 1902.



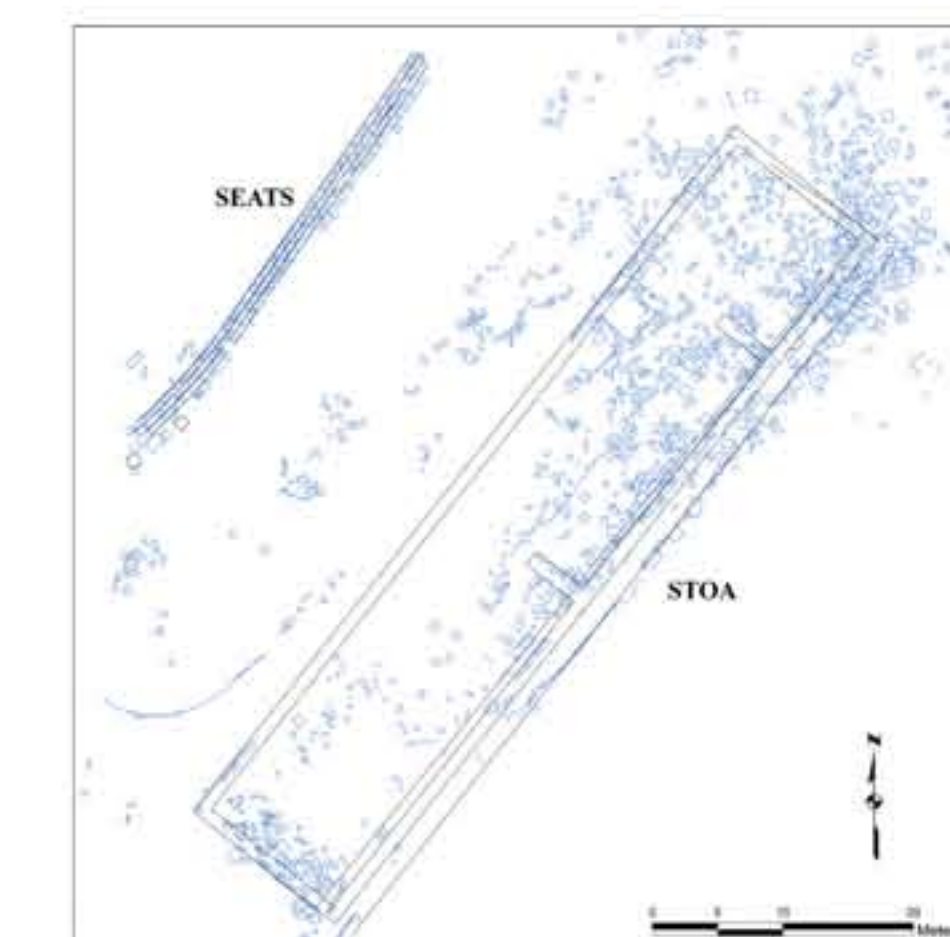
Digital terrain model of upper and lower sanctuary, Mt. Lykaion



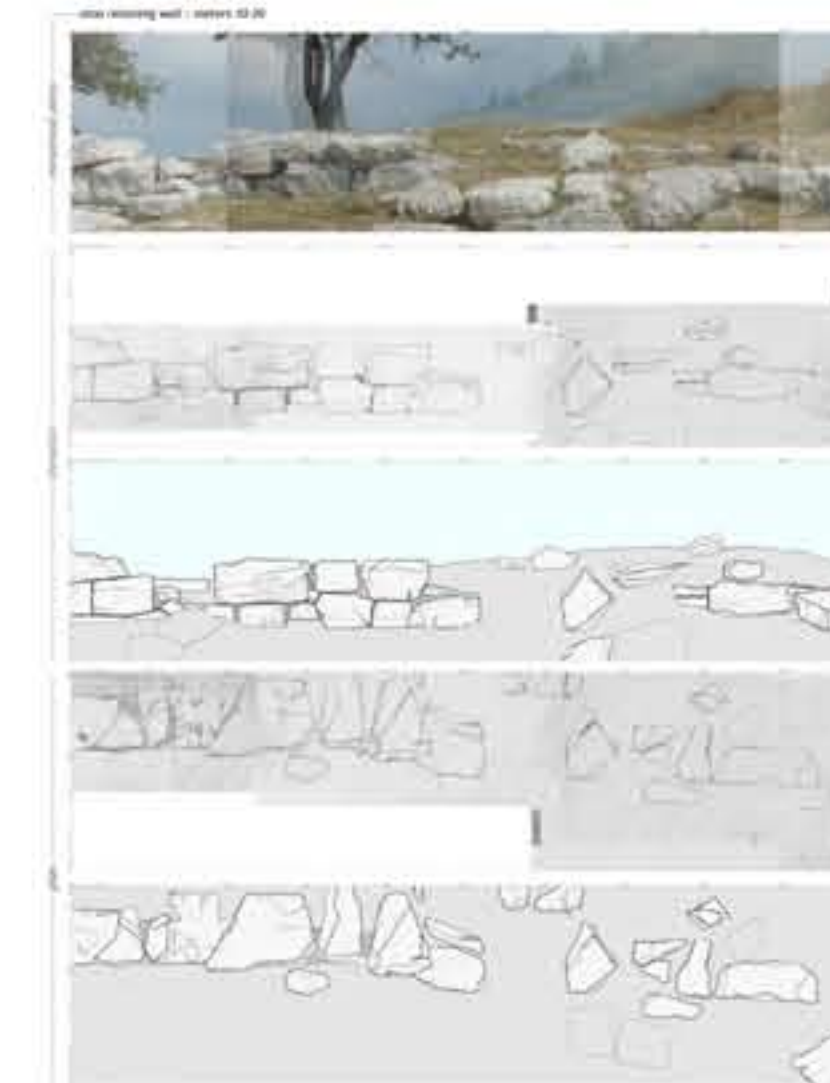
Southern area of the hippodrome



Pottery sherds  
 475 & 450 found in trench B



Electronic total station survey of 67 m long stoa and seats showing thousands of blocks measured in the area.



## TRENCHES IN THE HIPPODROME

During the 2006 summer season excavation was initiated in the area of the ancient hippodrome in the lower sanctuary. The location of the hippodrome, mentioned by Pausanias and included in a drawing by Blouet (far left) has been recognized for many years and as such is the only visible hippodrome in the entire Greek world. A long retaining wall extends on the eastern side of the hippodrome from the area of the bath at its north end to the south, but stops before the southern end of the structure. Geophysical remote sensing was carried out by Dr. Apostolos Saris in 2005 in portions of the area of the hippodrome (rectangle visible left in area between trench A and trench C). During the summer season of 2006 our trenches (A, B, C, D) were opened in the general region of the south end of the hippodrome (see plan far left). The objective of three of these trenches (A, C, D) was to determine the southern and possibly the eastern limit of the structure. Trench A was also dug in search of the starting assembly of the hippodrome. The objective of trench B was to determine if the low embankment towards the southwest end of the hippodrome was ancient or whether it was a modern creation related to the Modern Lykaion Games that have been held in the area of the hippodrome every four years since 1973. Trenches A, C and D were all found to contain to a large extent the fill brought in on top of the floor of the ancient hippodrome to create the modern track surface. Approximately the top 1.4 m. of fill of each of these three trenches was found to be the product of these modern preparations. In trench A (section near left) at a level approximately 1.7 m. below the modern surface and immediately above the bedrock in the area was found a hard packed clay level that suggested a manmade ancient layer. In this level was found several joining fragments of a coarseware bowl or saucapan with lid (near left). Based on parallels from Corinth (Edwards, Corinth VII, iii, #687) the shape suggests a 3rd or 2nd century B.C. date. If the clay surface is or is a portion of the floor of the hippodrome the date of the pottery is related to the use of the facility. This trench will be expanded in 2007.

The location of trench B to the southwest was found to be dug into an ancient embankment which revealed several ancient surfaces, one of which appears to be 4th century B.C. in date. The level of this surface is approximately 2 m. above the level of what may be the hippodrome floor surface found in trench A. Trench C was dug specifically to look for the southern limit of the hippodrome floor and in the northern aspect of the trench there are indications that the hippodrome floor may be near.

Trench D was dug in order to investigate the possibility that there once existed a dromos of a stadium inside the limits of the hippodrome floor (digital terrain model left). This has been suggested based on the location and orientation of a series of stone starting line blocks towards the middle of the hippodrome floor to the north. Approximately 1.4 m. below the modern surface was found a hard packed clay surface that may be related to the floor of the dromos of the stadium. This area will need further excavation in 2007.

## ARCHITECTURAL DOCUMENTATION

One of the most important aspects of our work is the documentation of the above-ground standing architecture from both the upper and lower areas of the sanctuary. Few photographs and drawings exist from the excavations in the early 20th century of the stoa, seats, xenon?, altar and temenos. Since 2004, thanks to the support of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, it has been possible to bring a series of skilled architecture students from the University of Pennsylvania School of Design to Mt. Lykaion to undertake a major architectural documentation project. The architects are creating a large database of the most significant architecture at the site by means of making a series of measured hand drawings. They have drawn individually over 1700 blocks by the end of the 2006 summer season. Each of these blocks includes a computerized database entry that is keyed to a geodatabase for the site.

The architects work in tandem with a computerized topographical survey team that locates and measures features with an electronic total station. The survey team has mapped the precise location of thousands of blocks in the area of the stoa and the seats alone (see drawing far left). Each one of the blocks is then drawn by hand by the architects and is fitted into the surveyed location of the block on the map. The architects have also been creating elevation drawings of the standing walls and structures at the site. For instance in the figure to the immediate left is a sequence that illustrates the work done on a 10 m. section of the retaining wall of the 67 m. long stoa building. At the top of the sequence is a series of photographs of the retaining wall that have been shot in series. The first level below the photographs are the hand drawings of the elevations that were made of the same stretch of retaining wall. The second level below the photographs show the hand drawings after their computer enhancement when different line weights are assigned to the hand drawn lines. The lowest two levels show the plan view of the same stretch of retaining wall, the hand drawings above and the computer enhanced drawings below.

The hope is that by means of creating this actual-state drawing and database, together with future excavation, it will be possible to recreate on paper and on the computer the original design of the buildings and structures at the site.

## PAUSANIAS, DESCRIPTION OF GREECE

[8.38.5] There is on Mount Lykaion a sanctuary of Pan, and a grove of trees around it, with a hippodrome in front of which is a stadion. Of old they used to hold here the Lykaion games. Here there are also bases of statues, with now no statues on them. On one of the bases an elegiac inscription declares that the statue was a portrait of Astyanax of the race of Arceas.

[8.36.6] Among the marvels of Mount Lykaion the most wonderful is this. On it is a temenos of Lykaion Zeus, into which people are not allowed to enter. If anyone takes no notice of the rule and enters, he must inevitably live no longer than a year. A legend, moreover, was current that everything alike within the precinct, whether beast or man, cast no shadow. For this reason when a beast takes refuge in the precinct the hunter will not rush in after it, but remains outside, and though he sees the beast can behold no shadow. In Syene also just on this side of Aethiopia neither tree nor creature casts a shadow so long as the sun is in the constellation of the Crab, but the precinct on Mt. Lykaion affects shadows in the same way always and at every season.

[8.38.7] On the highest point of the mountain is a mound of earth, forming an altar of Zeus Lykaios, and from it most of the Peloponnesus can be seen. Before the altar on the east stand two pillars, on which there were of old gilded eagles. On this altar they sacrifice in secret to Lykaion Zeus. I was reluctant to pry into the details of the sacrifice; let them be as they are and were from the beginning.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK

An aspect of our current activity at Mt. Lykaion is a proposal to create a cultural landscape as an archaeological park. The opportunity exists to create a cultural landscape that would unify and protect a large and mostly mountainous area in Western Arcadia. This area includes numerous archaeological sites as well as historical and cultural landmarks of importance. The proposal would include the creation of (and improvement of existing) roads and paths that link these archaeological sites, in addition to signs, maps and explanations to describe the many natural, historical and archaeological features in the landscape. The proposal would also seek to protect the natural environment of the area. The area of the cultural landscape is limited on the east by the ancient city of Trapezous to the northwest of Megalopolis, on the north by the northern peak of Mt. Lykaion, to the northwest by Mt. Kotilion and the archaeological site of the Temples of Apollo, Aphrodite and Artemis, on the west by the ancient city of Phigaleia, and on the south by the Temple of Pan at Melpia. The area includes but is not limited to the ancient region of Parhassia described by Thucydides and Pausanias, at the heart of which was Lykosoura. The area is a beautiful mountain landscape that is largely untouched and remote in the modern day. The roads and trails would be appropriate for walking, hiking and back-packing and would become a very attractive area for European (as well as other) tourists.



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## BRONZE FIGURES FOUND IN THE TEMENOS



Standing Hermes

Seated Zeus

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Many individuals have contributed to the creation of this poster and we include their names here with thanks.

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Hermes from the temenos

<http://lykaionexcavation.org>

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