

Research report - Lemnos 2003

Recent discoveries

The objective of this exploring expedition was to increase our knowledge of last year's campaign. For this reason we have again thoroughly investigated the important prehistoric sites [Poliochni](#), [Myrina](#) and [Ifestia](#) (Hephaistia). Furthermore, we succeeded in making new discoveries - the sacred mountain [Kakavos](#) and the cave sanctuary at [Kavirio](#).

Poliochni:

The vast ruins of the `most ancient city of Europe` impresses as well by the extension as by the building structures.



City wall

On the hilltop recent excavations have unearthed further buildings. The archaeological result confirms our assumption that this part was a separate district. It attests our observation that there were two outstanding building complexes. On one hand, the hilltop is dominated by a so-called Megaron (palace-like building), which by its strategical position controls the city and the whole bay.



Megaron on hilltop

On the other hand, in the center of the city there stands out a second building complex, quite near the granaries and near the imposing Bouleuterion (a large rectangular building with broad rows of seats - presumably the `parliament` of the city community). The discovery of a valuable gold treasure emphasizes its importance.



Granary near the city palace

The existence of two independent palaces can be explained by the dual queenship of the Amazons - one queen who was responsible for the military sphere resided in the palace on the hilltop, whereas the other queen who was responsible for civil administration lived in the city center.

Recent excavations unearthed walls in the slope to the sea. It demonstrates that there have been buildings up to the shore, maybe in connection with a harbor.

Very striking are the twin peaks at the south side of the Poliochni bay. It is very likely that these little hills are artificial.



Twin peaks at the south side of the Poliochni bay

In connection with Poliochni it seems probable that those monuments are sepulchers or memorials of the Amazon double queens. Excavations would be helpful.

Much information provides an intricately carved seal stone which has been found in Poliochni.

The central figure on this picture is a woman wearing a long gown. She holds something in her hands - most probably a weapon. With some fantasy this item can be interpreted as a bow. Although due to its miniature size the representation is rather schematic, the woman appears to be an Amazon who is shooting the bow. Because of her importance on this picture we may see in her the Amazon queen.

On this seal stone there are representations on three planes. There are fighting scenes (fleeing and conquered naked male warriors), the depiction of a landscape (mountain and wood), animals (horses?), musicians and dancing figures.



Detail on the Poliochni seal stone, on the right side you see the woman who is dominating the scene - the Amazon queen ?

Castle of Myrina:

Already last year we have been surprised by the large number of prehistoric vestiges on the hill of Myrina castle.



Myrina castle, seen from the hill sanctuary Richa Nera

This year we intensified our investigations, and we succeeded in making new discoveries. Our last year's discovery, the rock engraving which shows a woman who wears a headdress made of animal skin and holds a bow (?) - quite like the Amazon representations in Greek art – is clearly discernible. An astonishing pendant is the depiction of an Amazon queen on the previously described seal stone from Poliochni.



Woman with headdress made of animal skin in same orientation and posture (perhaps also with bow) like the central figure on the Poliochni seal stone

There appears to exist a further figure on this rock engraving at the right side – maybe the depiction of an animal.

Also that rock which – as we see it - is formed in the shape of a vulva is clearly discernible and may very well be connected with the matriarchal Amazon culture.

In this area there are on the whole numerous traces from the prehistoric period. Some meters distant to the rock with the engravings there exists an imposing cave.



Entrance to the cave on the Myrina hill

On the back wall of this cave there are also prehistoric rock engravings (picture below). Amazingly, you encounter a very similar motif to the above described rock engraving: A standing woman with bow (?) in the center, in front of her a kneeling person. We must assume that this scene again shows an Amazon, and the person in front of her is presumedly a conquered male warrior who pledges for mercy.



on the left there is a kneeling figure, on the right a standing woman with a bow fixed on her shoulders

On the south side of Myrina castle there are remains of rows of seats which have been cut into the rock. These seats are aligned in this way that the spectators look at two tiny islands of almost the same size lying side by side. This landscape motif reminds of the eye-catching twin peaks south of Poliochni. Here again you find this dual principle which you very often encounters in the prehistoric culture of Lemnos. In our opinion it reflects the dual queenship of the Amazons – a significant characteristic of the matriarchal Lemnos culture.

Richa Nera

Opposite Myrina castle there is the striking rocky hill Richa Nera where the topmost boulder bears the lineaments of a demonic scowling face. Numerous prehistoric traces are visible there.



Hill sanctuary Richa Nera

Quite mysterious are the many uniform, rectangular shaped holes which have been drilled into the rock. They are very often arranged in a straight line.



Sacred place with mysterious holes in the rock

Not only the central cult place has been ornamented by these holes but also some rocks on the hilltop. These drilled holes are all approximately the same in width, in height they differ slightly. All these holes converge wedge-like. The purpose of these holes is undetermined. The concave shape is reminiscent of prehistoric axe blades. Have the battles axes been put into these holes for ritual reasons?

At the northern foot of this hill – the south and west sides are at the sea – there are scanty remains of stone walls which are arranged in parallel lines. They appear to be the remains of an enclosing double wall or maybe it was the enclosure of the procession way leading to the sanctuary.

On the cragged south side of this cult hill at the sea front there are faintly discernible rock engravings in bas-relief. At least, you can clearly see animal feet (right picture below). It is difficult to determine the species of animal but most probably it is a wild animal (wolf, jackal ?). The central boulder to the right has the appearance of a standing figure with out-stretched hand (left picture below). This figure seems to point at Myrina castle. The engraved animal at his feet would consequently represent his escort animal.



schematic figure with out-stretched hand pointing at Myrina castle



close-up of the rock engraving representing a wild animal

Actually, there is no doubt that these engravings and the sculpture are consistently connected with the prehistoric sanctuary of Richa Nera.

Hephaistia:

At cape «Ekato Kefalon» in the vicinity of the ruins of classical Hephaistia there are impressive remains of a prehistoric sea fortress.

Traces of architectural elements are perceptible, so you see a rock-cut throne facing the open sea. In the center of the very destroyed fortress there are two rooms which are conspicuous, the first one is a small rectangular room with a funnel-shaped entrance, the other one is an almost circular room with a striking niche in it.



rectangular room with funnel-shaped entrance



circular room with mysterious niche

In the large inner court of the fortress there is an isolated huge boulder which attracts the attention. Its position suggests that it is the remnant of a large altar or maybe a temple. It is reminiscent of the Amazon temple made of stone on the sacred island of the Amazons, Aretias (Giresun Adasi in Turkey).



inner court with altar or temple?

The place of this prehistoric fortress is called «Ekato Kefalon», which means translated «Hundred Heads» because at the much corroded rock walls schematic figures and faces can be seen. It seems obvious that these figures are not the fortuitous result of wind and weather but the scanty vestiges of prehistoric rock sculptures and engravings.



a throne which was cut into the rock, on the left there are vestiges of prehistoric figures

On the picture above you see a throne which was cut into the rock, and on the right side there is a square boulder with traces of rock engravings. Actually, there can be discerned two figures facing each other.

Kakavos:

New destination of our exploring trip was the mountain Kakavos (280 meters above sea level). On the top there is a well-known chapel consecrated to Panagia (=Holy Virgin) Kakaviotissa. The mountain Kakavos with its jagged silhouette dominates the landscape in the southwest of the island.



Silhouette of the Kakavos mountain seen from the south

A rather steep rocky ascent leads to the summit. Many traces of prehistoric origin are perceptible: rock-cut niches, artificial cavities, and drilled holes. Near the summit you reach two artificial platforms which obviously had cultic purposes, from the upper one you have a perfect view to the hill of Myrina castle – the prehistoric center in the west of the island.



prehistoric platform on the Kakavos mountain

On the way to the chapel you see remains of prehistoric walls made of loose, medium-sized stones. The last stretch to the chapel leads over a staircase made of stones. The place of worship is inside a

cave which obviously was a cult place since prehistoric times. The ceiling of the cave consists of numerous hollows. The ritual place resembles an uterus, therefore it is not very astonishing that this chapel was consecrated to Panagia (Holy Virgin), surely in direct succession to the pre-Christian almighty Mother-Goddess.



Chapel of Panagia Kakaviotissa

Inside this cave there is a small room separated by a wall – presumedly this was the most holy, the depository for the holy items. On the back wall of this cave there are engravings, the remnants of prehistoric rock art.



rock engravings on the back wall of the Kakavos peak sanctuary

Unfortunately, these engravings are too indistinct to allow an interpretation.

In the whole summit area there are many traces of prehistoric workmanship (drilled holes, artificial cavities and platforms). So there is a conspicuous platform immediately above the holy cave.

The uterus-like shape of this cave perfectly fits to its purpose as sanctuary of the almighty Mother-Goddess. Regarding its shape there is an immediate parallel to the Amazon fortress Tekkeköy in the Thermodon region – the classical homeland of the Amazons in northern Turkey. The upper part of Tekkeköy castle has a similar construction. Concerning its position – hidden on a mountain peak – it is more reminiscent of Karpu Kale – the last refuge of the Thermodon Amazons.

Kavirio:

At Kavirio in the northeast of Lemnos there is a Cabiri sanctuary which was famous in the archaic and classical Greek period. The Cabiri were gods of vegetation and fertility, and connected with mysteries. At the sea-shore directly below the Greek ruins there is the famous cave of Philoktetes. According to the ancient tradition Philoktetes had taken part in the expedition against Troy. Unfortunately, on the island of Lemnos he had been bitten by a snake, and for that reason he had been left on this island by his comrades.

To enter the interior of this cave there are two approaches, one by the sea the other by land.



seaward access to the cave of Philoktetes

The access from the land is only a narrow opening in the rock, which is apart from the narrowness easy accessible. You enter an approximately semi-circular cave. Near the entrance there is an artificial rock bench, a first hint to its ritual purpose in the prehistoric period. The ceiling of this cave consists of numerous hollows. A very similar ceiling – though much larger – we have encountered in the cave of the Kakavos peak sanctuary.



rock bench in the cave of Philoktetes, in the background the land-side access

The cave impresses alone by its splendid play of colors because the daylight radiates through the corridor-like access from the sea. On the semi-circular back wall of the cave there are again cave paintings and engravings of presumed prehistoric origin.



prehistoric rock painting in the Kavirio cave

In the center of the wall you perceive a bulky figure looking to the right, he (she) appears to hold a bow in his (her) hand. Unfortunately, the lineaments of the face have been destroyed. In front of this painting there is another figure of small size - maybe a cat? Quite to the left there you see a column-like shaped sculpture of a woman.

Location and appearance of this cave as well as the ancient mythological tradition are significant hints that this cave was a ritual place since prehistoric times. The figure with bow in this cave is a striking correspondence with the Amazons who were regarded as great archers.

Summary:

Our recent findings of several prehistoric rock paintings and engravings at different sites on Lemnos enriches our knowledge about the matriarchal Lemnos culture, and gives us valuable insight into the contemporary figural art. The seal stone from Poliochni is an important pendant in contemporary craftsmanship.

The discovery of prehistoric places of worship, the peak sanctuary on the Kakavos mountain and the cave sanctuary at Kavirio gives evidence of the veneration of the almighty Mother-Goddess – a significant feature of matriarchal culture.

Our new findings at the centers of the Lemnos Amazon culture, Myrina and Poliochni, provide many facts for the reconstruction of its history. So there is evidence that powerfully points to the existence of dual queenship – a significant characteristic of the Amazons. There was the principle of division of responsibility, one of the queens looked after the domestic sphere, the other one was a military queen, overseeing the warriors. Together they shared the leadership.

However, there are yet much more to discover on Lemnos:

Rewarding destinations for further exploring trips are the site Mikro Kastelli in the northwest of the island where a prehistoric settlement has been unearthed, and the mysterious rock formations at Agios Ermolaos.