

SKRIFTER UTGIVNA AV SVENSKA INSTITUTET I ATHEN, 8°, 22  
ACTA INSTITUTI ATHENIENSIS REGNI SUECIAE, SERIES IN 8°, 22

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# Perspectives on ancient Greece

Papers in celebration  
of the 60th anniversary of  
the Swedish Institute at Athens

Edited by Ann-Louise Schallin

STOCKHOLM 2013

# Each in its right place

## The placing of the votives at the early temples at Tegea

### Abstract

During the Norwegian-Greek excavations below the Classical temple of Athena Alea at Tegea in 1990–1994, strata belonging to several phases of the earlier sanctuary were found. In this article I will concentrate on those belonging to one of the structures below the temple, a building destroyed some time during a period when early Middle Protocorinthian was popular and reached Arcadia, i.e. probably in the 680s BC. The layers belonging to this building give us an opportunity to reflect on how small votive objects were deposited in connection with the building, which types of votives were chosen and to discuss whether this building should be seen as a temple or a repository.

During the Norwegian-Greek excavations in 1990–1994 below the Classical temple of Athena Alea at Tegea, strata belonging to several phases and structures of the earlier sanctuary were examined.<sup>1</sup> Building 1, found beneath the Skopas temple, stood for only a limited number of years, perhaps fewer than 20, but we still can see a change over time both concerning the placing and the choice of votive objects that were found in and around it.

A short overview of the find contexts in Tegea is necessary. Already by the second half of the 8th century, the rise of the built temples is symbolized by the votive houses of terracotta of which two fragments were found at Tegea. I have argued elsewhere that the models can be seen as reflections of the role of the *oikos* and especially the women's role in it.<sup>2</sup> The buildings in Tegea, both the one discussed here and its predecessor, were erected to the west of a *bothros* and found below the Classical cella. Thus there are at least two phases of apsidal wattle-and-daub buildings with the same orientation and construction, consisting of wooden posts with reed-reinforced clay walls in between, covered by white lime stucco.<sup>3</sup> In them fine decorated pottery of open shapes, small finds of a votive character, including metal rings, pins, sheets and a few miniature vessels, were found.<sup>4</sup>

In the older Building 2, the assemblage of small finds mostly consisted of small metal artefacts of personal adornment and jewellery: pins, rings, beads and decorated bronze bands etc. Most of the finds appeared in debris just

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<sup>1</sup> Preliminary accounts of the 1990–1994 seasons appear in *AR* 1990–1991 to 1994–1995 and in 'Chronique des fouilles', *BCH* 115, 1991, 863; 116, 1992, 860; 117, 1993, 797; 118, 1994, 717f. Substantial preliminary reports appear in Østby *et al.* 1994 and Østby 2002. The final publication, *Tegea* 1, is in preparation.

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<sup>2</sup> Nordquist 2002.

<sup>3</sup> The building remains are further discussed in Nordquist forthcoming.

<sup>4</sup> Voyatzis 2002, 2005 and Voyatzis in *Tegea* 1, forthcoming. Voyatzis has also discussed the finds from the earlier excavations, Voyatzis 1994.

above the level from which the postholes were cut, i.e. in layers that stratigraphically postdated the postholes. Few clear use surfaces could be identified on the level of the postholes (Fig. 1).

were originally hanging on the walls or on posts or resting on shelves along the walls and fell to the floor when the building was destroyed by fire.<sup>5</sup>

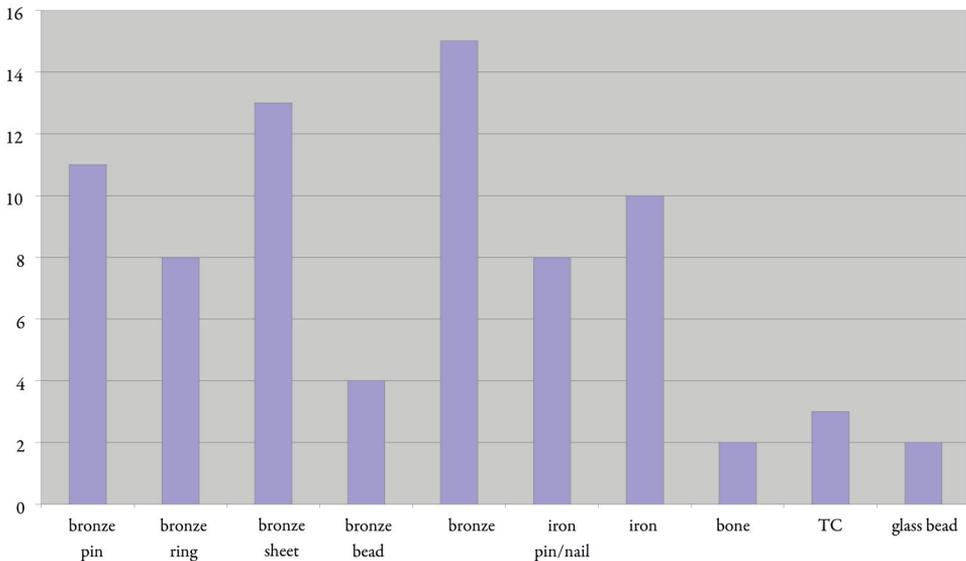


Fig. 1. Small finds in the layers of Building 2.

A similar situation prevailed in the younger building under discussion here, which was destroyed in *c.* 675 BC. Its apse was found some ten centimetres above that of its predecessor. The strata of the building yielded a large variety of small finds, personal jewellery of bronze, such as pins and rings, bronze sheets, as well as for example terracotta figures (Fig. 2). The finds from the interior of the building were found mixed in the debris and no clear use surface could be identified. Homer describes in the *Iliad* VII.81–83 and the *Odyssey*. 3.273–275 how gifts to the gods were hung on the temple walls or deposited on the cult statue itself (*Il.* VI.302–303). Since the finds here, including pottery sherds, were found in the debris of the walls, it can be suggested that, as Homer tells us, votives of various type, including vessels,

In contrast to this inner part, an area that could be identified as a depository area was situated in the porch of Building 1. This building was 12 m long and had a straight eastern front, identified as a porch ending with a wooden partition. Just inside this partition was an area consisting of at least five superimposed, thin, lime-covered floors, divided by thin layers of soil. The area was preserved only in its northern part and there measured 2 × 1 m (or two square

<sup>5</sup> Possibly the dense concentration of postholes in the apse of the older building should be considered here. We could not establish any certain concentration of finds in this area. On the other hand it belongs to a part of the “old” sanctuary that may have been heavily disturbed when the Skopas temple was erected. Nordquist 2002.

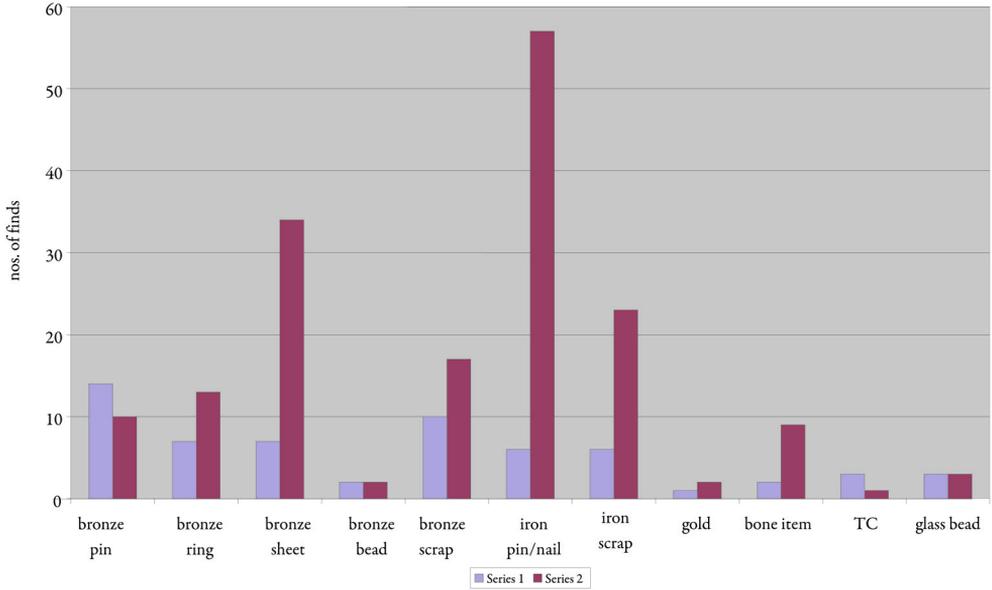


Fig. 2. Comparison of small finds in the interior of Building 1 and floor in D1 (Series 1: Interior of Building 1; Series 2: Depository floors in D1).

metres). On the floors were many offerings and compared with the earlier building the number of metal finds, personal jewellery, and ornaments was quite striking (Figs. 2–3). These objects would have been deposited there, whether on the floor itself or on some kind of structure, by the donors, participants in the cult.

These finds must also be compared with the finds from the *bothros* in front of the building.



Fig. 3. Floors in D1.

This *bothros* dated back to the Protogeometric period. It contained black, sooty and compact soil, animal bones, and pottery. The lower levels contained large amounts of Laconian Protogeometric pottery. In the upper levels, this was replaced by mainly Argive imported pottery, indicating a change in the “foreign” relations of the sanctuary.<sup>6</sup> A large number of small finds was also found in the layers of the *bothros*, such as small fragmented gold items, a large number of miniature vases, small gold fragments, artefacts of sheet bronze, discs and also bronze rings. However, it should be noted that very few pins were found (Fig. 4). In layers relating to a metalworking area encountered over the *bothros*, the find combinations were more or less the same as in the levels of the buildings, although fewer items were found<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 5).

<sup>6</sup> Voyatzis 1990, 2002, 2005. Voyatzis in *Tegaea* 1.

<sup>7</sup> Nordquist 1997.

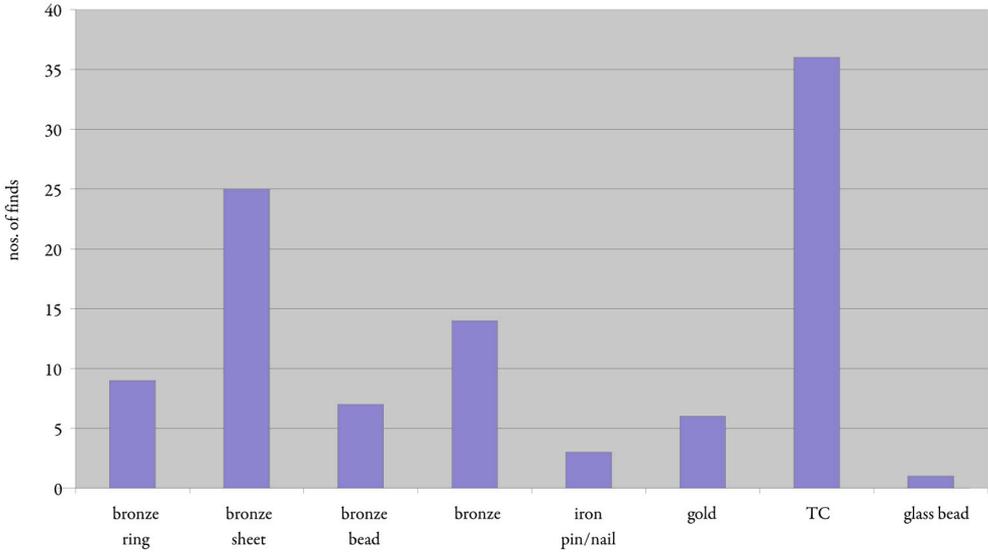


Fig. 4. Small finds in the bothros.

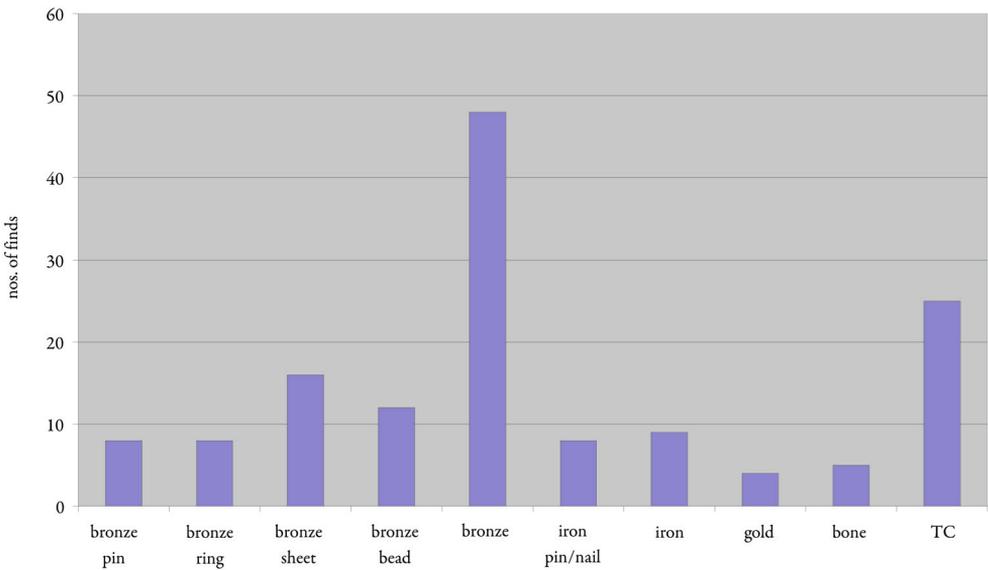


Fig. 5. Small finds in the work area.

## What was found where?

The comparison between the floors in the porch and the interior of Building 1 produces interesting patterns. I have here chosen to compare the finds from the depository floor in the porch (two square metres in grid D1) with the surface in the interior of the building excavated within grid C1 (roughly ten square metres). This latter surface in grid C1, although not a clear use floor or surface, was distinguished by being the level from which the postholes were cut.

On the depository floor the iron items in particular must be noted. Iron pins predominated among the small finds, but here were also found some bronze pins, small gold fragments, two small bone rams, a lead wreath and a scarab of glass paste. Altogether 179 small items (not counting pottery sherds) were found on the floor (two square metres), and a further 82 items in the 2–4 cm thick layer of debris above the floor.

In the grid C1, an area of *c.* 5 × 2 m (*c.* ten square metres), more than twice the number of small finds (88 items), was recovered from the *c.* 5–7 cm deep debris above the surface cut by the postholes), than was found on that surface cut by the postholes itself (39 items), perhaps indicating that objects sometimes were placed on or along walls of the building, rather than

placed on a floor. The objects were later disturbed when the collapsed building debris was levelled out before a new structure was erected. The interior of the building, where a larger area and larger quantities of soil were excavated, thus yielded fewer small finds than the small depository floor in D1. To put it another way, we can look at the finds ratios: In the depository area in the porch we found 261 finds from 2 sq m = 130.5 items per sq m, which can be compared with 127 finds from 10 sq m = 12.7 finds per sq m for grid C1 in the interior of the building. This gives a ratio of 10.27:1 for porch depository compared to interior finds. In other words there were over ten times as many in the porch as in the interior.

But on the other hand the finds from the interior of the building were more varied in type. Bronze ornaments of various kind, sheets, rings and pins were most common. This continues a pattern that was found also in the older Building 2. Many bronze items such as pins were found also there, but in these lower layers another artefact type dominated: here bronze rings were more common than in the layers above. Rings and pins in other words seem to have had different depositional histories.

Returning to the finds in Building 1, we can note that of the pins from this building (*Fig. 6*), as many as 57 iron pins were found on the depository floor (and another five appeared



*Fig. 6. Iron pins from Building 1.*

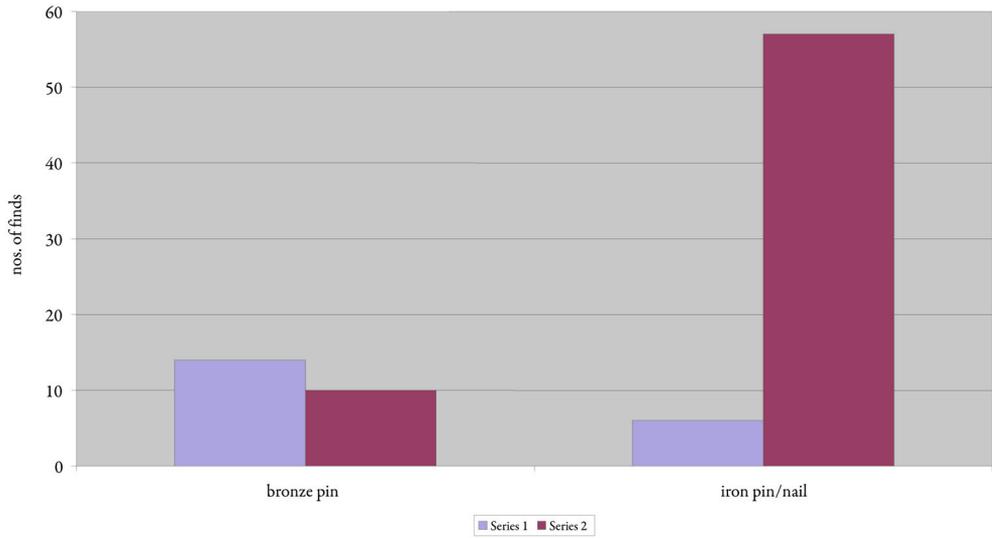


Fig. 7. Bronze and iron pins in the interior of Building 1 (Series 1) and on the floors of the depository area (Series 2).

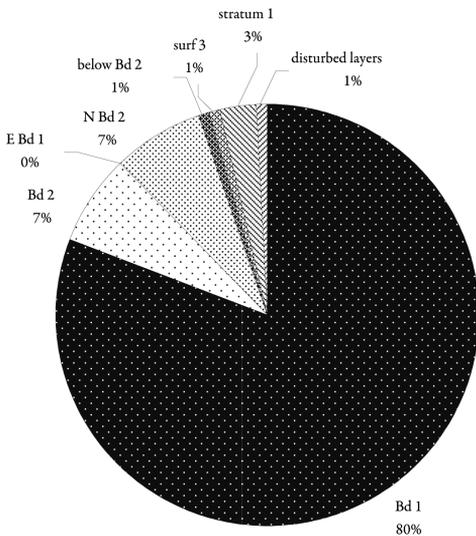


Fig. 8. Distribution of iron pins in the temple trench.

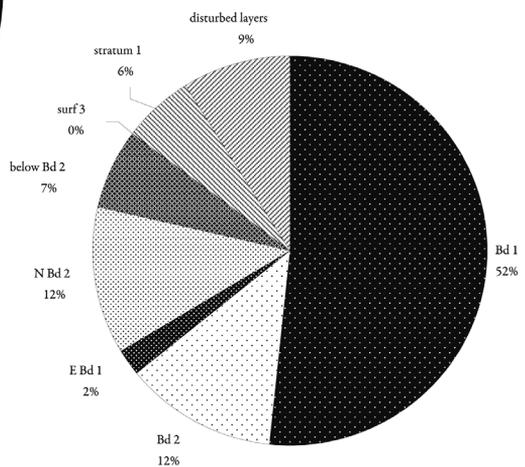


Fig. 9. Distribution of bronze pins in the temple trench.

above it), compared with only six in grid C1 (Fig. 7). On the whole, more than three times the number of iron pins were found in the layers of Building 1 than in the other layers in the cella excavation (Fig. 8). In the case of bronze pins the difference in numbers is smaller. A total of 21 bronze pins was recovered from the depository area in D1, against 16 from the larger area in C1. That around half of the bronze pins found in the cella trench came from Building 1 (Fig. 9), should be seen against the fact that Building 1 was larger than Building 2.

Turning to the metal rings and sheets, as many as 19 bronze rings and 39 bronze sheets came from the floor in the depository area, while 13 rings and nine sheets were recorded from C1. In contrast to the metal finds, objects of terracotta, glass and lead were more evenly

distributed, and pottery sherds were more frequent in the layers of the interior of the building. Everywhere the pottery was very fragmentary, however.

It is also worth looking at the miniature vessels since they also show interesting distribution patterns. In the cella trench, most of the miniatures again came from Building 1, but an almost equal amount belonged to the disturbed areas to the east of the buildings. From layers that belonged to Building 2, miniatures were less common (Fig. 10), but as already mentioned, this building is smaller than Building 1. Also, perhaps not surprisingly, relatively few sherds of miniatures were found in the work area over the *bothros* in front of the buildings (28 items), compared with in the *bothros* itself (128 items). In the *bothros* the number of

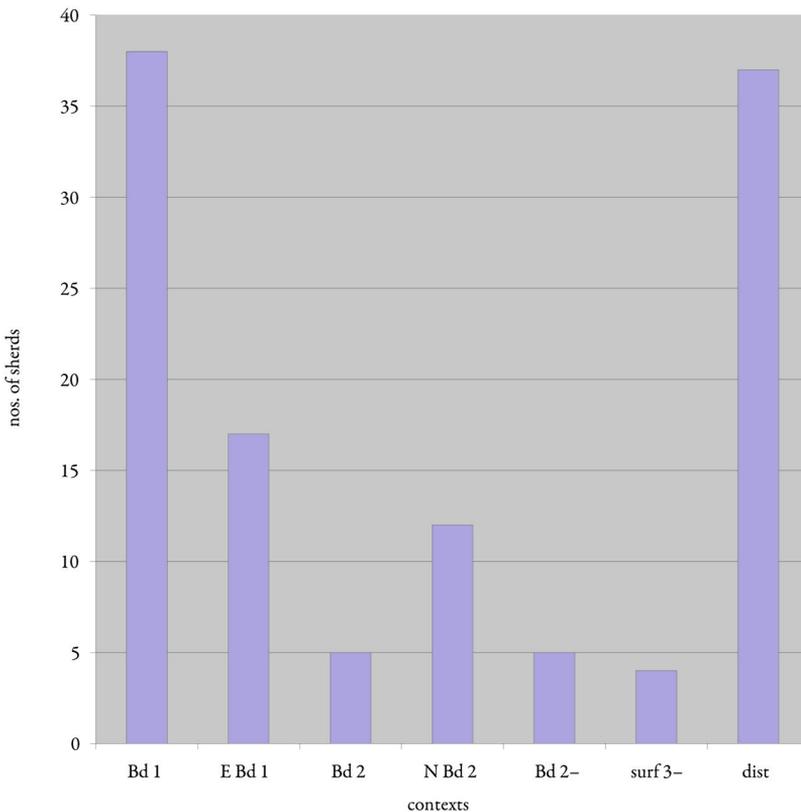
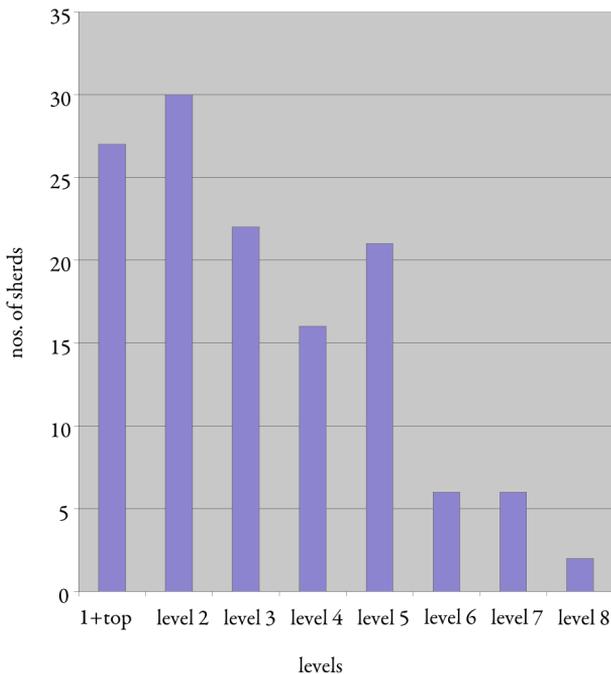


Fig. 10. Number of sherds of miniature vessels in different contexts in the temple trench.

Fig. 11. Number of sherds of miniature vessels in the levels of the bothros.

miniatures declined in the lower levels (Fig. 11). Although these figures must be treated with caution, since the work area, as well as the lower levels of the *bothros*, represent small quantities of excavated soil, the general tendency is clearly that miniatures are more frequent in the later layers of the 8th century than in the earlier periods.



## The function of the floors

As already implied, the character of the votives changed over time. In the earlier periods, pins were rare and instead bronze rings were more commonly offered, as attested by the finds in the *bothros* as well as the lower floors in the depository area. But for a short period in the early 600s BC, iron pins were apparently very popular gifts to the god, as attested by the finds on the lime floor of Building 1.

The “things”, objects, artefacts found in the sanctuary reflect not only religious preferences but also “fashion”, to use a word with many significances: fashion in clothing and personal ornaments, but also fashion in offerings, due to availability of material and socio-religious conventions. There is also the question of availability of material and technological development. The question is whether and/or how these perspectives are related. A fashion change, inspiring or necessitating new implements, for example to fasten the clothes—how is that related to

the finds of votive offerings in the sanctuary? Do gifts of jewellery reflect a “modern” society or in other words the fashion of the day? Are they on the contrary the things that had fallen out of fashion? Or can they be seen as cultural heritage, belongings of older generations that have been especially precious and revered as such?

Iron was used in pins, that is, for ornamental as well as practical purposes, during a period of rather short duration in the beginning of the 7th century. This may reflect a period when iron had become more accessible to the everyday person, while still retaining qualities that made it suitable both as a personal ornament and as a votive offering, as it was not so common that it was considered a base metal. It was also a period when the technology to enable the fashioning of small items of iron, such as pins, had spread more widely and had become available to more craftspeople. After all, modern material will often be interesting to use for ornamental purposes. One may compare with the steel jew-

ellery popular during part of the 19th century in Europe, or modern ornaments in titanium, plastic or re-used technological components. Iron may of course also have had qualities that were ascribed to its magnetic properties. But on the other hand, the number of pins of both bronze and iron could also reflect a change in fashion during the Dark Ages, a change in clothing that necessitated differing ways of pinning the clothes. It would seem most likely that the gifts of iron pins thus reflect the modernity of the age, for whatever reason, rather than historical nostalgia. However, one may note that there are, for example, no iron rings found.

Similarly, the use of miniature vessels seems to have increased during the early period of the sanctuary and continued also into the Classical Age.<sup>8</sup> This seems rather to reflect a change in ritual/cultic behaviour that lasted for a much longer time than the short-term popularity of a certain kind of personal ornament as a gift.

The floor area of the porch functioned as a depository area, which was accessible to all visitors to the sanctuary, who there could leave their personal votive gifts, and also to those who either did not need to or were not allowed to proceed further into the building. In view of the lack of any clear floor or use surface in the interior of Building 1 it may be suggested that it may not have been accessible to other than a few persons/specialists and thus the floor that must have existed was not heavily trodden by many worshippers. If access was restricted, it indicates that there were temporary or permanent religious experts with rights and duties that did not extend to everyone, or that the interior of the building was used only on special occasions. There is of course also possible that the interior use of the building included the periodical cleaning of it, but does not account for the lack of more defined floors/use surfaces in at least parts of the interior.

Instead, the gatherings of the celebrants, as in other Greek sanctuaries, would have taken place outside the buildings. This of course is in line with what we know of later cultic practices. As in later sanctuaries, the votives were periodically cleared away. The finds in the *bothros*, although mostly earlier in date than those in the building we are discussing, seem to be of that character, the remains of cult ceremonies and sacrifices in the sanctuary. The depository area was probably also periodically cleared of more cumbersome votives, then lined with fresh lime and left clean for new votive gifts from the visitors.

The finds, although modest in nature with predominantly personal items and ornaments, give some insight into the cult practice, as well as glimpses of the behaviour of the cult participants when depositing votives. It is likely that this was not an isolated case, but rather that various such practices existed, albeit with local differences, in all sanctuaries.

14 June 2011

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<sup>8</sup> Hammond 1998, 2005 and forthcoming in *Tegea* 1.

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