



LIONBYTES

AN OCCASIONAL COMMUNICATION TO SUPPORTERS OF THE NEMEA CENTER

APRIL 2013

IN THIS LIONBYTES

The Temple

The Basilica

Our Greek Friends

The Temple Stands!

And then there were six. With epistyles. Without scaffolding. Magnificent!

When the workmen's materials and equipment were cleared away from the Temple



of Zeus last fall, that wonderful monument stood gleaming in the autumn sunlight, framed by the bright Hellenic blue sky. It is a wonderful sight.

The temple itself dates from the late fourth century B.C., sitting atop a yet earlier sacred structure. Its fate was varied over the centuries, but by the late second century A.D. the roof had been allowed to collapse and the sanctuary was taking on the look of a languishing, disheveled old man. With the

triumph of Christianity, all respect for the august space vanished and the temple suffered the indignities of systematic destruction by men extracting building stone for other buildings in the surrounding area. The huge drums tumbled outward upon the ground, sprawling in wretched remembrance of what had been. Three columns alone remained upright through the ensuing centuries. Then, in the 1980s, Professor Stephen Miller was inspired to begin a project to resurrect at least some of the fallen columns. In the late 90s two were re-established in their proper places. After a lull, Miller, with the help of many others but especially of Theodore Papalexopoulos, the Opheltes Foundation and Club Hotel Casino Loutraki, resumed the work in 2004. Now, after almost ten years, the temple boasts not three, or five, but nine columns, ... six of them carefully, painstakingly set a-right again after perhaps a millennium and a half. The work of engineers Nikos Makris and Konstantinos Papantonopoulos, of architect Katerina Sklere,

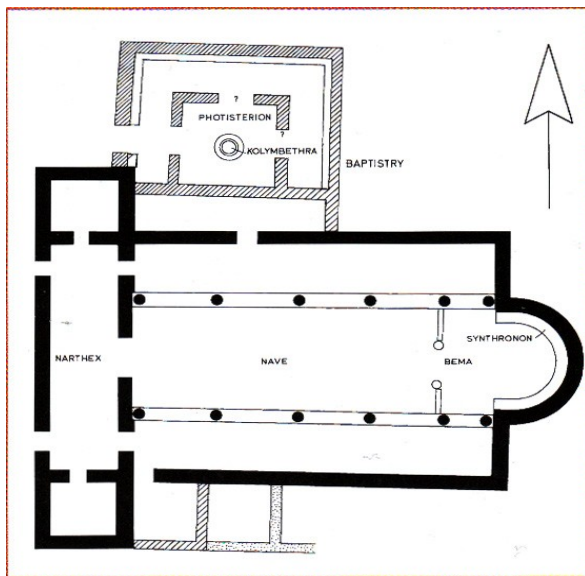
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and since 2009 of expert workmen Thanasis Karadasis, Christos Saisanas, Elias Papoutsis, and Ioannis and Michalis Sxizas has produced a modern marvel of conservation, preservation, and reconstruction that brings admirers and emulators from all over Greece and beyond. On June 15th Director Shelton will host a grand celebration at Nemea to toast the completion of this huge project. There will be music and food, and recognition of contributors and donors.



Speaking will be Ministry of Culture officials and professionals from outside the project, including noted engineer/architect and preservationist Costos Zambas and James Wright, Director of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens and an erstwhile excavator at Nemea itself.



The Basilica

As is well known, the area of the Sanctuary of Zeus continued to be inhabited for a long time after the classical period. The decay of the sacred spaces that was clearly visible to Pausanias in the second century A.D. continued unabated until by the fourth century a settlement of locals had taken over the ruins, living, planting, and burying their dead. As Christianity swept away polytheistic rites and rituals in its rapid spread following the conversion of Constantine, the community built a basilica to worship in. The foundations of the ancient lodging house, the xenon, were the perfect shape and spolia from the abandoned temple ready building materials. A modest structure arose. Dating to the early fifth century, it is one of the oldest basilicas we have remnants of in the Peloponnese. The building was first

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excavated in the early work at the site, in the 1920s, then resume during the 1960s. Enough remained to give archaeologists a good idea of the architecture of

The Basilica's apse



the structure, and finds added information about the religious life of the time. The bad news is that these excavations exposed the very fragile foundation stones of the xenon/basilica to rapid deterioration. Professor Stephen Miller took action in 2005 to cover those foundations with clean dirt, to preserve them. The excavation finds lay essentially unstudied until very recently, when Jared Beatrice and Jon Frey undertook work on the graves and skeletal material associated with the Early Christian

community and its basilica. The combination of unique and important finds and the presence of a very early Christian basilica make it extremely important that work continue. The preservation of the remains of the basilica are among the top priorities at Nemea. Director Shelton has obtained a permit from the Ministry of Culture to allow conservation and preservation work. Under her supervision, the efforts of the LythoSyndirisi company could begin as early as this summer on careful and deliberate conservation of this significant monument. *But this project depends entirely on private donations.* In the Temple of Zeus we now have a fabulous monument to the polytheistic period of Nemea's life. It is entirely appropriate that the Christian presence should be well presented architecturally as well. If you would like to support this important work financially, please contact Director Shelton (sheltonk@berkeley.edu).

The Basilica's baptistry



Our Greek Friends

The political situation in Greece continues to be unsettled. Greeks everywhere are suffering from the austerities that have been implemented and their concomitant economic and social ramifications. These are difficult times, and the Center is constantly aware of the challenges our friends and partners in and around Nemea must meet. The Center continues to work actively with local Greeks and to offer as much employment as possible. We will also maintain the high level of preservation and conservation that has marked our custodianship of the site over the years.