

Doric Temples in Southern Arcadia – Who Built Them and Why?

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Greek temples were neither indispensable nor really necessary for the cult of the gods. Although they are clear manifestations of Greek architecture and religion (most of them can be regarded as monumental votive offerings or gifts to the gods¹), their construction was not primarily a religious, or a purely artistic phenomenon. Temple constructions were communal projects *par excellence*; given the large scale of material and human resources involved and also the considerable time needed to complete them, they depended on various political and socio-economic factors. Their analysis cannot, therefore, be reduced to the architectural and cultic perspective but must include the consideration of historical and economic aspects as well.

However, which community commissioned or built a certain temple, why the decision was made to construct one, and how it was financed has not usually been investigated in detail, unless ancient sources provided some explicit information for these questions. Even if there is no surviving written evidence about the commissioning community or the occasion of the temple's building, it was not realized that it is still possible to attempt an answer to these basic questions. In most cases, the size, materials, and decoration of the buildings are clearly discernible and provide a basis for calculating the approximate costs of the construction.² Based on this economic evidence and on the location and chronology of the building, one can tentatively reconstruct the historical circumstances of a temple building in certain cases.

This method was applied to a few outstanding monuments, namely the temple of Zeus at Olympia and the temple of Apollo Epikourios at Bassae; I have argued in detail that the historical circumstances were quite different from those mentioned by our written sources.³ The temple of Zeus at Olympia was almost certainly erected by the victorious Greeks with the booty taken from the Persians at Plataea and the temple of Apollo Epikourios by the *neodamodeis* settled by Sparta on the border of Elis after the peace of Nikias. Later on, Xenophon certainly acted in a similar way, when he was settled by Sparta at Skillous and built a temple for Artemis there (*Xen. Anab.* 5.3.4–7). Victorious Eleans conquering Triphylia can be supposed to have built the temples at Makiston and Prasadaki during the first half of the fifth century BC (*Hdt.* 4.148). Smaller temples like the temple of Demeter at Lepreon and the metroon in Olympia equally can be supposed to have resulted from military conflicts.

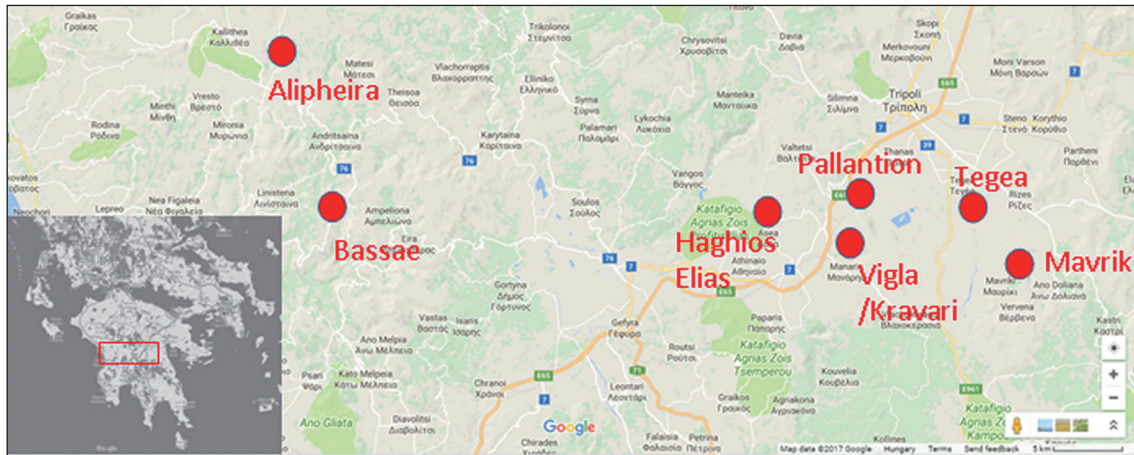
Military conflicts resulting in substantial territorial changes seem to have been the main driving force and the financial basis for building peripteral temples in Triphylia. The general lack of historical narratives makes it ultimately impossible to prove this impression beyond doubt. However, I think it is significant that if there is some evidence, it seems to fit into this explanation very well, irrespective of the widely varying size, date

and geographical setting of the temples involved; there is certainly no positive evidence pointing to some different, peaceful context. Admittedly, it was not always and not only military victories that motivated Greek temple building and there were certainly other financial resources as well. Nevertheless, I think it is worth investigating the remaining temples of southern Arcadia in a similar way. The temples considered here (fig. 1) are Doric ones (not necessarily peripteral), and are made of stone (at least in part), in most cases of local Dholiana marble.

There are a surprisingly large number of them in this region and it is only recently that they received appropriate attention.⁴ Architectural investigations clarified their date and they were also considered by historians, mainly as an indicator of economic strength and to express the strong identity of local communities barely known from contemporary literary or epigraphic record.⁵

The only one for which we have some written evidence is Tegea. The military success of Tegea against Sparta was surely exaggerated by the local informants of Herodotus, who described the spolia displayed around the temple, but it is quite impossible that the entire story would be fictive.⁶ Lacedaemonians surely tried for a longer period of time to conquer at least some parts of the fertile Tegean plain without any success; there must have been some spectacular Tegean victory even if it did not affect dramatically the entire Lacedaemonian army. Whether the building of the Archaic temple in the late 7th century was connected somehow to this process is not certain, but this is usually assumed and seems to be inevitable. The large, ambitious temple could perhaps be interpreted as a prospective challenge to Sparta, as Østby did, assuming that the temple building preceded the military conflict. Yet, for practical reasons it is much more likely the other way round: temples tended to be erected as victory monuments after profitable wars, and in this particular case one can easily point out a territory, the conquest of which was celebrated by the temple building.⁷ The same certainly holds true for its successor in the 4th century. When the Archaic temple was destroyed by fire in 395/394, the rebuilding could not be started immediately, but only after a successful war and consequent territorial gain of Tegea at the expense of Sparta.⁸

To the south of Tegea, high up in the mountains, at ca. 1,500 m above sea level, there is a small temple at Mavriki or Psilikorphi.⁹ It is the earliest temple built entirely from the marble of the nearby quarries at Dholiana and it is occasionally (but most probably not correctly) identified with the temple of Artemis Knakeatis mentioned by Pausanias (8.53.11). Its date has been disputed, but the most recent architectural study by E. Østby has conclusively shown that it belongs to the middle decades of the 6th century, most probably antedating 550 BC.¹⁰ It is usually regarded as a temple built by Tegea, but as Herodotus clearly attests, Tegea did not gain anything in this period. Rather, it was rather Sparta that succeeded in overcoming its old enemy and therefore it makes much more sense to attribute this building to the victorious Spartans than to the defeated Tegeans.



Location	Deity	Stylobate dimensions	Date B.C.	Colonnade
Tegea	Athena Alea	(10 x 37,50)	ca. 600	Peristyle?
Mavriki /Psili Korphi	Artemis (Knakeatis?)	6,63 x 13,92	560-550	Tetrastyl, prostyle
Vigla / Kravari	Athena Soteira / Poseidon (Paus. 8.44.4)	10,49 x 23,26	530-520	6 x 13; marble roof
Haghios Elias	Pan (?)	12,04 x 29,51	490-475	6 x 14
Pallantion C	Katharoi theoi (Paus. 8.44.6)	11,27 x 25,33	ca. 500	Peristyle unfinished
Alipheira	Athena	10,65 x 29,58	490-480	6 x 15

Fig. 1: Doric temples in southern Arkadia.

Actually, Herodotus (1.68) does not speak about a single overwhelming Spartan victory over Tegea, but implies a series of encounters in which the Lacedaemonians regularly defeated their Tegean opponents. He does not specify the consequences of these victories, but since the original goal of the war was the conquest of Tegea, one is most probably not mistaken in supposing that eventually, at least some parts of Tegean territory were occupied and received settlers from Lacedaemon.¹¹ Thus, it would be surprising to find only the small temple at Mavriki to commemorate this process. Indeed, there is a whole series of Doric capitals from Tegean territory, which attest to other building activities during the second half of the 6th century and might be interpreted in this way.¹² The temple at Vigla most probably belongs to the same context as well: the votive finds found in the sanctuary itself were uniformly of Laconian workmanship,¹³ and thus it is quite probable that it was frequented by worshippers coming from or at least sympathetic with Laconia. As Vigla is on the border of Asea, it is generally assumed that it was an Asean building. But this is not necessarily the case, since Pausanias' text (8.44.4) is not explicit about this and even if it were, it is obviously not reflecting the situation at the time of the temple's building. Moreover, the temple seems to have undergone some restoration/renovation during the 5th century BC, but the sanctuary went apparently out of use after the 4th century. This situation would be quite hard to understand if the temple was actually built by the polis of Asea, which seems to have flourished during and after the 4th century BC.¹⁴ Pallantion is definitely closer to Vigla, so it could equally be attributed to this polis, but the Vigla pass seems to have connected Asea to Tegea and not to Pallantion, which was accessed via the lower pass to the north at Kalogeriko.¹⁵ Given the date of the temple around 530 BC, it is very unlikely that Tegea had some important victory (yielding significant booty or territory) to celebrate. Since the temple is located on the fringes of Tegean territory, one can reasonably suppose that this temple was, similarly to the one at Mavriki, also built by Lacedaemonians who settled here after their victories around the middle of the 6th century.

For the interpretation of the remaining temples in southern Arkadia there is absolutely no written evidence to rely on. As an example, Alipheira, which is on the border between Arkadia and Triphylia, is not mentioned anywhere before the 4th century. However, a relatively large and unusual Doric peripteral temple was built here on the acropolis shortly after 500 BC.¹⁶ And this building has a striking counterpart that is roughly contemporary, which could qualify as a twin-brother: temple C in Pallantion. On the acropolis of Pallantion there was a whole series of small temple buildings (none of them Doric, nor peripteral), apparently all built during the first half of the 6th century.¹⁷ Temple C is, however, an unfinished one (the foundations for a peripteros were already added to the earlier building), and this must be due to some specific reason. The usual explanation as rivalry or competition are hardly convincing in this case, because of the large distance between the two buildings. A mere coincidence is equally unlikely. It is much more probable that after abandoning the building project in Pallantion,

the people commissioning/building the temple restarted a similar project at a place far away from the unfinished temple.¹⁸ They were most probably exiles, with the cause of their migration being some internal strife. The quickly completed building project in the new locality certainly indicates some surplus or resources, which could point to an aristocratic group expelled from their home town.

Finally, there is an astonishing Doric temple close to the summit of the Mountain Aghios Elias, located ca. 1,100 m above sea level. It was the largest Archaic temple in Arkadia made entirely of stone and has therefore attracted much attention recently.¹⁹ It was constructed approximately at the same time as the temple at Alipheira and the unfinished Temple C at Pallantion, shortly after 500 BC or during the first decades of the 5th century.²⁰ It is usually assumed that the temple at Aghios Elias was built by Asea, but I think it is significant that the most recent excavators concluded that, given its size, location, and the enormous costs implied, it is quite impossible to suppose that it was erected by Asea alone. The same authors also suggested that it was a federal sanctuary built by the neighboring communities of southern Mainalia.²¹ However, this is hardly more convincing either, since there is absolutely no evidence for such a local grouping or interstate organization (e.g. confederation or amphiktyony) of them. Instead of assuming some kind of federation of these small states, it is legitimate to suppose that a more important *polis* was involved and Tegea is a very good candidate for this, not only because of its close proximity, but also because of the date of the temple. During the first decades of the 5th century, Tegea seems to have recovered from the Spartan attacks and was certainly aspiring for a regional leadership; relying obviously on some allies in neighboring Arkadia, it even challenged Spartan supremacy (Hdt. 9.35).²²

As strongly suggested by the dimensions and some special architectural features (like the fourteen columns and the krepis with four steps), the temple on Aghios Elias was conceived as a reply to the earlier building at Vigla and was meant to outdo it.²³ This is quite understandable if the temple actually commemorated a victory that Tegea and Asea achieved over their enemies, the Lacedaemonians and Pallantians, who constructed the Vigla temple about one generation earlier.

Provided that the above considerations are not entirely mistaken, one can reconstruct the historical situation leading to the building of these temples in the following way. The temples at Mavriki and Vigla most probably celebrated local victories achieved by the Lacedaemonians over Tegea, which occurred shortly after the decisive turning point of Spartan-Tegean relations, as described in detail by Herodotus. Pallantion, presumably an ally of Sparta, also constructed several temples on its acropolis during the first half of the 6th century. These buildings were certainly erected to represent the identity and independence of Pallantion, but I think this propaganda was primarily directed against Tegea and not against some kind of Lacedaemonian expansion. During the period when these temples were constructed at Pallantion, Tegea was able to resist Spartan attacks; therefore it is likely to have been dangerous for Pallantion as well, which can be supposed to have sought and received some support from Sparta against Tegea. After all,

both Pallantion and Sparta were interested in acquiring some fertile lands of Tegea and thus they were naturally allies.

Afterwards, around 500 BC, the military and political situation changed and Tegea, relying on Asea as an ally, succeeded in overcoming its opponents in the region. The temple on Aghios Elias was built to celebrate a victory most probably over Pallantion, where the pro-Spartan citizens were expelled and built a new temple at Alipheira resembling their old unfinished one at home.

To sum up: Temple building could be seen as an ideal means for strengthening the cohesion of a community, but this is not documented in any case. I suggest instead that military success yielded territorial gain, and that conquests can explain temple-building activities in a much more plausible way. In general, it was not some small Arkadian communities resisting Spartan aggression who built the strikingly elaborate and large Doric temples, but first the victorious Tegeans and afterwards the Spartans penetrating the southern parts of Arkadia at the expense of their Tegean enemies. Only these two large poleis could afford to build representative temples and their competition was the main driving force behind the building projects. This reconstruction certainly fits the chronology of the temple buildings very well, since they were erected in periods when the struggle between Tegea and Sparta was most fierce and building activities ceased as long as Tegea remained a faithful ally or subject of Sparta.

Notes

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¹ Most recently: Wilson Jones 2015; cf. also Burkert 1988 and 1996; Fehr 1996.

² As already observed, “it was upon the size that the cost would largely depend.” (Coulton 1977, 74). Building costs for certain temples are preserved or can be calculated approximately. See e.g. Burford 1969 and Prignitz 2014 (Epidauros); Stanier 1953 (Parthenon); Martin 1972; De Angelis 2003, 163–169 (Poseidonia, Selinus and Akragas); and Patay-Horváth 2014 (Olympia).

³ Patay-Horváth 2015 (for Olympia); Patay-Horváth forthcoming (for Bassae).

⁴ Holmberg 1941; Rhomaios 1952 and 1957; Østby 1991; Winter 1991 and 2005. It is worth pointing out that some of these temples are poorly preserved and even some basic features are subject to unexpected revisions. E.g. Rhomaios’ view on the amphiprostyle ground plan of Mavriki was generally accepted until Østby 1991, 310 pointed out that there is no evidence for this. Østby 1991, 354–360 Fig. 195 proposed that the temple at Aghios Elias had 14 columns on its flank, but corrected this himself (Forsén et al. 1999, 172f.) and returned only a few years later to the number of 13 proposed long ago by Holmberg.

⁵ “The large number of Archaic temples found in Arkadia attests to the existence of a wide range of well-defined local communities which had developed to such a degree of communal organisation that the construction of a temple was possible and to such a degree of individuality that it was also desirable, in order to assert the local identity in the face of outsiders; the temples themselves may even have served to further enhance local distinctness.” (Nielsen 2002, 184). Østby 2005, 501 is more cautious: “These Arcadian temples, which cluster particularly in the half century from about 530 to 480, must reflect a period of eco-

nomical and artistic flowering whose historical background escapes us.” Iozzo 1991 and Voyatzis 2000 are discussed at the end of this paper.

⁶ Herodotus 1.66. Cf. e.g. Welwei 2004, 93–95. It is often assumed (e.g. Cartledge 2002, 118) that this “Battle of the Fetters” took place during the first half of the 6th century, but as Wickert 1961, 9 already pointed out long ago, Herodotus does not imply a date, and the text rather suggests that it took place considerably earlier. Later sources (like Paus. 3.7.3; 8.5.9) ascribe the first disastrous defeat of the Spartans to Charillos, who is alleged to have been taken as prisoner as well.

⁷ As usually assumed on the basis of Paus. 8.45.1, Karyai and Oion were most probably Tegean before the mid-6th century, when these were incorporated into Lacedaemon. (Callmer 1943, 61 f.; Nielsen 2002, 96 f.) These mountain regions, together with Phylake in between them, might well have been the territories annexed by Tegea before building the temple around 600 BC. The undated Tegean victory, when a snow-fall came to the aid of the Arkadians (Paus. 8.53.10) can perhaps be connected to this.

⁸ For the date and its uncertainty, see Østby 2014, 341–346.

⁹ Rhomaios 1952; Jost 1985, 159–161.

¹⁰ Østby 1991, 320–323.

¹¹ The traditional view that the war resulted in a treaty between Sparta and Tegea, which eventually became the foundation of the so-called Peloponnesian League, was challenged with convincing arguments in my view by Cawkwell 1993, 368–370. Cf. also Nielsen 2002, 188–191. Oion and Karyai certainly were conquered (and because of its location, Phylake presumably as well), but some parts of the Tegean plain could equally be occupied.

¹² Østby 1991, 305 f. figs. 176. 4–9.

¹³ Jost 1985, 196.

¹⁴ Jost 1985, 197.

¹⁵ Forsén 2003 63–65 with figs. 39. 70. 71.

¹⁶ Nielsen 2004, 509 f.

¹⁷ For a summary, see Nielsen 2004, 526, for a discussion of the temples Østby 1991.

¹⁸ Østby 1991, 380 f. lists the similarities in detail, Østby 2005, 501 summarizes them and suggests that “the interrupted project at Pallantion was consciously followed up here” (i.e. Alipheira), but does not specify how and why this happened.

¹⁹ Most recently: Forsén 2008.

²⁰ For the date, see Østby 1991, 360 f.; Forsén et al. 1999, 176 f.

²¹ Forsén et al. 1999, 186.

²² Callmer 1943, 78–87; Wolff 2012, 28–42.

²³ Østby 2005, 500.

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