

The cultural heritage of the Sanctuary of Demeter at the city of Eleusis

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Abstract

This paper presents a major part of the ancient cultural heritage of the city of Eleusis from the classical antiquity. Eleusis is located in an area continuously inhabited since the Neolithic times, 19 km west of Athens, the capital city of Greece. It had been one of the most important sacred cities of antiquity for more than a thousand years, famous to the Greco-Roman world for the Eleusinian Mysteries and their connection with the religious myth of goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone. The main site of those rituals was the Sanctuary of Demeter, which is surrounded nowadays by the modern city of Eleusis.

Keywords: Eleusis, cultural heritage, demeter, persephone, eleusinian mysteries, sanctuary

Introduction

The area of Eleusis has been continuously inhabited at least since the prehistoric times, as it is evident by the local artifacts, exhibited at its Archaeological Museum, located inside the Archaeological Site of Eleusis (Fig. 1).



Fig 1 A Neolithic marble standing female figurine [1]

The city itself is known since the mythical times of the Mycaean Era (c. 15th – 10th century BCE), located at the same place, 19 km west of Athens, the capital city of Greece, with the same name since then. Its history is inextricably linked to the myth of goddess Demeter, daughter of deities Cronus and Rhea, sister of god Zeus and mother of Persephone [2].

According to this myth, Persephone had been abducted by god Hades, brother of Zeus, and her mother Demeter, taking human form, left Olympus and, after wandering in search of her daughter, eventually came to Eleusis. There, she met the royal family of the city and was invited to stay in the palace, where she remained to mourn for her beloved daughter, patiently waiting for her to return. Indeed, Persephone, accompanied by god Hermes, arrived in Eleusis to reunite with her mother. Then, Demeter, the Olympian goddess of

the harvest and agriculture, restored the fertility of the earth and revealed to the royal family her sacred rites, the Eleusinian Mysteries [3]. Around this myth, a sacred site was gradually built in antiquity, becoming the Sanctuary of Demeter (Fig. 2).

Nowadays, the archaeological site of the Sanctuary of Demeter is surrounded by the modern city of Eleusis. It is located next to the central square of the city (Square of Heroes) and along the main pedestrian street (Nikolaidou Street) that connects the central square with the port of Eleusis. The archaeological site consists of several parts (23 in number) that will be described next [4, 5, 6].



Fig 2 The core of the primordial cult at the archaeological site of Eleusis (Source: Collection of X. Foulidi)

The Courtyard

The Courtyard (square) is the area where the faithful gathered after arriving at the Sanctuary. The Sacred Road ended at its northern end. At this point, the foundations of a semicircular building that constituted the *Exedra* ("Platform") from which officials of the Sanctuary monitored the arrival of the pilgrims are preserved. In Roman times, the courtyard (of 65 m long and 40 m wide) was paved with large rectangular marble slabs and was framed by magnificent buildings that defined its perimeter. The quality of the materials and the careful result indicate that the construction of the courtyard was part of a broader building program of the Roman emperors that began with the philhellene Hadrian (117–138 CE), to whom the

elevation of the entrance area for flood control reasons is also due, continued by Antoninus the Pious (138–161 CE) and completed by his successor, Marcus Aurelius (161–180 CE).

Triumphal Arches

To the southeast and southwest of the Roman Courtyard stood two impressive and identical triumphal arches. They are copies of Hadrian's Arch in Athens ^[7]. From the eastern arch the road began that led to the area outside the walls of the Sanctuary with baths, inns and other public buildings that served pilgrims during their visit to the Sanctuary. From the western arch the road began that led to the "Astyde" gates, in the western part of the wall, and then outside the Sanctuary, towards the city of Eleusis. Both arches are made of Pentelic marble and had a total height of 16 m. In their lower part, they formed an arch that had an opening at the threshold of 4.85 m. To the left and right of the arch there were pedestals that supported Corinthian-style columns, while at the corners there were pillars with Corinthian capitals. The surviving pedestals of the eastern arch are decorated with relief cross-shaped torches, one of the best-known emblems of the goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone. The upper part of the arches was divided by Corinthian columns into three parts, with the middle part bearing a pedimented crown, imitating the facade of a temple. There, most likely, the bronze statues of the emperors and members of their family were placed. On the epistyle of the arch and the two apses, the inscription was engraved on both sides: "TO THE GODS AND TO THE EMPEROR THE PANHELLENES". These are dedications to the two goddesses of the Eleusinian Sanctuary and to the emperor Hadrian, by the Panhellenes. These were the members of the Panhellenion, the Union of all the Greek cities of the three continents (Europe, Asia, Africa) in a federation based in Athens, which the emperor founded in 131/132 CE, and which had a religious, political and cultural character. The inscription was written in such a way that the word "emperor" was located directly above the center of the arched opening.

Loggias

A Γ-shaped loggia ("Stoa") defined the western and northern sides of the Courtyard, as far as the Sacred Road. The building had rooms only in the western part, while the northern part was a simple open loggia of small depth, with a row of columns on its side, facing the Courtyard to support the single-pitched roof. The rooms, as shown by their arrangement and size, may have been a place to accommodate official pilgrims of the Sanctuary, while the largest room, which had a mosaic floor with geometric decoration, was used for banquets and symposia. A smaller loggia closed the courtyard on the eastern side. The loggia had a row of columns, of which only the foundations remain today.

Fountain

Next to the smaller loggia, a fountain had been built to serve the needs of pilgrims upon their arrival at the Sanctuary, as well as their purification before proceeding inside. From this magnificent building, dating back to the 2nd century CE, the bottom of the Π-shaped tank with the open side of 11.30 m long to the east, towards the Courtyard, is preserved today, as well as the white marble platform with eight basin-shaped

cavities, into which water fell from eight taps. A second blue marble platform, slightly lower than the first, channeled the water through a groove into a central channel to the east, outside the walls. The superstructure was covered in marble and had six monolithic, ribbed columns with elaborate capitals. The architect A. Orlandos, who carried out the design representation of the entire Fountain building, emphasized the similarity of the columns and the elaborate cornice of the superstructure with the exterior of the building of Hadrian's Library, and attributed its construction to the philhellene emperor (117–138 CE).

Temple of Propylaea Artemis and Father Poseidon

About in the middle of the Courtyard, the pier of the Roman temple of Propylaea Artemis and Father Poseidon survives. Artemis was worshipped at Eleusis as the daughter of Poseidon and Demeter. The temple was built of Pentelic marble and had a wooden roof and clay tiles. It had a front and rear portico with four Doric monolithic columns. Its dimensions were similar to those of the small and elegant temple of Athena Nike on the Acropolis of Athens, as the Roman emperors wanted to construct buildings in the Eleusinian Sanctuary that imitated the corresponding Athenian ones. To the east and northeast of the temple are the remains of two altars, dedicated to the deities worshipped there. To the north are the remains of a pedestal, on which the statue of Poseidon was probably erected.

Eschara

Northwest of the temple of the Propylaea Artemis and Father Poseidon is the Eschara ^[8], a peculiar altar, dating back to Roman times and probably contemporary with the paving of the courtyard. It consists of a square well-shaped structure, 1.75 m deep, with walls made of adobe bricks, surrounded by a low limestone parapet. The fire was lit on the floor of the structure, while on a small ledge, approximately halfway up the height of the walls, was the metal grate where the sacrificial carcasses were placed, mainly piglets, which due to their fertility were the usual offering to the goddess Demeter. The fire was supplied with air by a system of six vertical ducts that penetrated the side walls. In the northeastern corner of the Eschara enclosure, remains of a wall from the 6th century BCE, built according to the polygonal building system, are preserved, while to the south of the enclosure, remains of an arched building from the 8th century BCE are preserved.

Great Propylaea

A magnificent entrance, the Great Propylaea, defined the southern side of the courtyard. This imposing building dates back to the Roman imperial period and was built on the old North Pillar, the simple fortress entrance of the time of Cimon (first half of the 5th century BCE). It faced Athens and was an almost faithful copy of the central section of the Propylaea of the Acropolis. It consists of two propylaea with six Doric columns on the facade. The northern propylaea, the outer one, had five entrances, accessible from the Roman courtyard by a staircase of six steps. Of interest are the many graffiti of floor games found on the steps and the paved floor, which demonstrate the use of the space by pilgrims for entertainment and social gatherings, before entering the main Sanctuary for the performance of the sacramental worship. The southern propylon led to the inner courtyard of the Sanctuary, which was accessible without a

staircase. Near this propylon there was a transverse wall with five doors, of which only the thresholds survive today. The wall divided the building into two unequal sections, with the northern section being significantly larger. To better support its roof, there was a portico with six elegant Ionic columns on the longitudinal axis, behind the two central columns of the northern propylon. The Doric columns of the northern facade were crowned by a frieze with flat epistyles, a frieze with triglyphs and metopes, as well as a pediment decorated on the tympanum with a relief bust of the emperor, placed in the center of a shield (*imago clipeata*, “image in arms”). The emperor wears a military breastplate (“*thorax*”) with a rather damaged gorgoneion in the center, on which a Christian cross was later engraved. It probably depicts Marcus Aurelius, who ruled from 161 to 180 CE and to whom the completion of the Great Propylaea is attributed. To the west of the monument, many of the surviving architectural members of the building are today concentrated, as well as the part of the northern pediment with the bust of the emperor.

Callichorum Well

To the northeast of the Great Propylaea, at a lower level, is the sacred well of the goddess Demeter, the Callichorum Well, which was created in the late 6th–early 5th century BCE. According to Pausanias, dances were performed there by the women of Eleusis that were part of the rituals in honor of the goddess. Today it is not fully visible due to the later buildings that were built to form the entrance to the Sanctuary during Roman times (2nd century CE). The current depth of the well is 6 m. Its interior has elaborate stone cladding, according to the polygonal building system. Its mouth consists of two concentric rings made of gray-blue Eleusinian stone, “the good dances”, as the excavator D. Filios characteristically mentioned in 1892. The stones were connected to each other with double T-shaped metal joints. Of the two rings of the mouth, the lower one had a dual function, since it served as a platform on which they stood to draw water, but also as a seat where the daughters probably sang hymns to the goddess. The space around the well is paved with limestone slabs, while dark Eleusinian stones define the perimeter finish. The entire space was enclosed by a high arched wall, limestone at the base and brick at the superstructure, with three access entrances that were possibly related to cult ceremonies. The wall, perhaps in 297 BCE, during the reign of Demetrius the Besieger, was converted into a low parapet, and was finally destroyed in the 3rd century CE.

Auxiliary Buildings

The auxiliary area of the Sanctuary includes the House of the Heralds, an underground cistern and the *sirroi*. The area, which extends west and east of the Great Propylaea, within the enclosure, preserves remains related to areas for storing the offerings of the faithful, with buildings for the administration of the Sanctuary, as well as with priests’ houses. These buildings date from the time of Peisistratus to Late Antiquity. In the western part of the auxiliary area, at the foot of the hill, remains of a building are preserved that the excavators identified with the House of the Heralds. The space was used for meetings and rituals by members of the sacred clan of the Orators. This is the second great priestly clan from which Dadouchos, the second most important priest of the Eleusinian Mysteries, came, after the Hierophant, who came from the priestly clan of the

Eumolpides, came. The building dates back to Roman times and consists of a large hall to the north, probably for the meetings of the Priesthood, and three successive rooms to the south. In the middle of these (room C) a fresco with animal figures and a representation of a seated Zeus holding a Nike was found. A libation basin and a small square altar, found in the same room, testify to the sacredness of the space.

Roman Cistern

In the eastern part of the auxiliary area, next to the Great Propylaea, the ruins of an underground cistern from Roman times are preserved, which ensured water self-sufficiency in the main Sanctuary. The cistern has two large underground vaulted spaces, which are made of stones and bricks and coated with waterproof mortar to ensure absolute tightness. The first space served as a settling tank. There, the water was cleaned, a first filtration, with the settling of foreign substances. The water was pumped from the second space of the cistern-distributor. A narrow staircase with stone steps had been constructed to access the two spaces. The upper compartment of the cistern, where the entrance is, preserves traces of marblework that testify to its luxurious construction. Water management was one of the main priorities in the reorganization of the Sanctuary during Roman times. The Roman emperors built large tanks with the aim of collecting an ever-increasing amount of water, necessary to meet the needs of the many fountains and bathing facilities. The emperor Hadrian (117–138 CE), himself initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries, carried out important hydraulic works in Eleusis. These include the arrangement of the Eleusinian Cephissus riverbed, the construction of the bridge at the entrance to the city, which is still visible today ^[9], as well as the aqueduct of the Thriasian Plain, which transported good quality water from the springs of Mount Parnitha to supply the city and the Sanctuary. Large sections of the Hadrianic aqueduct are still visible in several parts of the city. To the southeast of the cistern are the foundations of a large and elongated building (60×6 m) from Roman times that served as a *sirus*. The *sirus* were storehouses in which the “first fruits” were collected, i.e., the first fruits of agricultural production in a ratio of at least 1/200 for wheat and twice as much for barley, which all cities were obliged to offer to the goddess Demeter, as a kind of tax in kind. The “first fruits” were received by the priests of the goddess and both the immediate and timely delivery before the Eleusinian Mysteries, which were celebrated in the autumn, and the high quality of the agricultural products were required. South of the Roman-era *sirus* is the *sirus* of the Pericles era. One of the two rows of square pillars that supported the flat roof of a hypostyle building with a triangular plan is preserved, at a considerable height. Remains of the *sirus* of the era of Peisistratus are preserved to the west of the Small Propylaea. The *sirus* has a rectangular plan and is constructed with a particularly careful polygonal masonry system of Eleusinian ashlar blocks. It continues further west, under the later Late Roman wall that was built with various and different building materials to protect the Sanctuary during the 3rd century CE.

Small Propylaea

The Small Propylaea is a monumental building of the 1st century BCE that formed the inner entrance to the Sanctuary. They were built on the site where the Peisistratius North Pylon previously stood and formed the

main entrance to the Sanctuary, before it was extended further north, where the Great Propylaea were built. According to a Latin inscription on their epistle, they were dedicated to Demeter and Persephone by Claudius Applus Pulcher, consul and governor of Greece, who lived in the 1st century BCE. The building consists of two porches, an outer porch, to the north, and an inner one, towards the Telesteria. They were separated from each other by a transverse wall and a central double door that opened onto the inner porch, as indicated by the well-preserved semicircular grooves in the paved floor. Two other straight grooves, parallel to each other, probably served to drain rainwater. Access to the courtyard paved with large slabs was via two steps from the north. The composition of the outer porch was unique: the pediment above the gate rested on the pilasters of the door and on two Ionic columns, of which only the bases are preserved in place. The Corinthian capitals and the capitals of the columns bear elaborate decoration with winged animals (lions and bulls). Two of them are placed on the wall east of the Propylaea and the other two are exhibited in the courtyard of the Museum. The entablature had an Ionic epistyle and a Doric frieze, decorated with the cult symbols of Demeter: cists and sheaves of wheat on the triglyphs, rosettes and bucrania on the metopes. The ceiling was paneled. The configuration of the inner portico was different. It was covered with a flat paneled ceiling, which was supported by two monumental "Caryatids" made of Pentelic marble. One is exhibited in the Archaeological Museum of Eleusis ^[10], while the other was stolen by the English traveler Ed. Clarke and transferred to Cambridge in 1812, where it remains to this day. The bases that supported the Caryatids are preserved in their place. On either side of them there was originally a fountain. In a later period, side entrances were opened in place of the fountains. Caryatids are the female figures that support roofs and ceilings. The equivalent male figures are called "Telamons".

Plutoneion

West of the Small Propylaea, at the northeastern foot of the Sanctuary's hill, the rock forms two shallow, continuous caves. In these caves, it was believed that there was a point of communication between the upper world and the underworld. On the northern wall of the smaller cave, a transparent opening can be seen, on the outer side of which a staircase of six steps, carved into the rock is preserved. The staircase leads outside the enclosure of the site, to a lower altitude area, where there is a well-shaped trench. In front of the larger cave, the porphyry foundations of a small temple "in parastasis" are visible, with dimensions of approximately 5.12×6.80 m, dedicated to god Pluto, hence named Plutoneion. This temple dates back to the 4th century BCE. and replaced an earlier one from the 6th century BCE, measuring 3.40×4.70 m, incorporating its remains.

In the later phase, in the 4th century BCE, the area of the Plutoneion was delimited with the construction of a triangular retaining enclosure, built with an isodomic masonry system of limestone blocks, with a small propylon at its southeastern end. The enclosure separated the temple of Pluto from the rest of the Sanctuary. Inside the enclosure there is a well-shaped round trench that is probably related to cult ceremonies. Two votive reliefs found in this area and bearing representations related to Pluto and Persephone testify that the temple was the Plutoneion. Although the use of the caves and the ritual that may have been associated

with them have not been clarified, it seems that their location at this particular point was decisive for the choice of the site for the construction of the temple of Pluto. Their morphology may have served to represent the sacred drama of Persephone's annual return from Hades.

Processional Street

It was a continuation of the Sacred Road within the Sanctuary, and led from the Small Propylaea to the Telesterion. In Roman times, this road was paved with marble slabs, some of which are preserved in their place, especially in the southwestern section. To the right and left of the Processional Street there were pedestals that carried statues and other offerings. Some of these are still preserved in the area. Along the Processional Street, a stepped platform carved into the eastern slope of the rock survives, which due to its meticulous construction dates back to the 4th century BCE. It is likely that from this point the faithful watched some of the "events" that were part of the sacred reenactment, during the celebration of the Mysteries. On a rectangular terrace south of the platform, remains of a building identified with the temple of Hecate survive. The terrace is accessible by steps, carved into the rock and others made of limestone. Further south, on the right side of the Street, a large rock with a 0.53 m deep cavity at its top probably constituted a kind of "treasure" for the collection of the believers' monetary offerings.

Telesterion

At the end of the Processional Street, to the south, is the northeastern entrance to the Telesterion. This is the most important building of the Sanctuary, as it was the place where the cult ceremonies of the Eleusinian Mysteries took place. The oldest remains discovered during excavations at the site date back to the Mycenaean period and belong to a rectangular mansion-shaped building, known as "Megaron B", with two columns along the main axis and a portico with stairs on the facade. In the same location, at the beginning of the 6th century BCE, the Soloneion Telesterion was built, which included a rectangular cell with a polygonal masonry system.

The spread of the fame of the Sanctuary and the continuous increase in the number of believers during the second half of the 6th century BCE, made it necessary to erect a new building, always in the same location, due to the sacredness of the space, which, according to legend, had been indicated by the goddess Demeter. This building, known as the Peisistrateio Telesterion, had large dimensions and elaborate decoration, characteristics that it retained in the classical and Roman periods. It was an almost square hall (25.30×27.10 m approximately), with three entrances on the eastern side, in front of which there was a Doric portico with 10 columns on the facade and two on the narrow sides. Along the northern, southern and western sides there were stepped platforms, each with seven steps. From there, the initiates watched the events. In the southwest corner of the hall was the Palace, a small rectangular space in which the sacred objects of worship were kept. Entry to it was permitted only to the high priest, the Hierophant, who, on the night of the Mysteries, would take the sacred objects out of there and reveal them to the initiates.

The architectural remains that are visible in the area today are mainly related to the Telesterion of classical times, the Philoneian Stoa (4th century BCE) and the Roman

reconstructions (2nd century CE). The classical Telesterion was an almost square hall, like the earlier Peisistrateion, with larger dimensions (51.20×51.55 m approx.) and two entrances on the eastern, northern and southern sides. On the eastern side it had a Doric pediment with 12 columns on the facade and two on the narrow sides. Platforms of eight steps, carved into the rock, either existed or artificially constructed with stone blocks, were formed along each side. It is estimated that there was space for about 5,000 standing spectators. The roof of the building was supported by 42 columns (six rows of seven columns each). On top of these was a second row of columns that reached the ceiling. In the center of the roof there was the “opaeon”, a type of raised skylight from which light entered the interior of the building. In the center of the hall was the Palace (“Anaktoron”). The throne of the Hierophant was located outside the entrance to the Palace.

The Telesterion of classical times was designed by the architect Ictinus. His plan, due to construction difficulties and the death of Pericles, seems not to have progressed much. Subsequently, the construction study was successively assigned until the completion of the project to three architects, Korobos, Metagenes and Xenocles. At the end of the 4th century BCE, the Philoneian Stoa was added to the eastern facade of the Telesterion, the design of which was undertaken by the Eleusinian architect Philo. The Stoa was founded on a strong stereobate and its floor was paved with slabs of Eleusinian limestone. It was in the Doric style with twelve columns on the facade and two on the narrow sides, of which only parts of the lower vertebrae survive. The columns, as well as the superstructure, were constructed of Pentelic marble.

In 170 CE, the Telesterion was burned down by the Costoboki, raiders of northern origin. In its reconstruction, during the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180 CE), the plan of the classical period was preserved, with an extension of about two meters to the west. In Roman times, two staircases were also carved into the rock that led to an elongated square, 70 m long and 11.45 m wide (Upper Courtyard), which was formed by leveling the rock along the western side. During all periods of operation of the Telesterion, the faithful gathered in the Sacred Courtyard that extended to its eastern, northern and southern sides. Altars and numerous votive offerings were erected there, and sacred ceremonies were performed.

Temple of Faustina

At the northern end of the Upper Courtyard of the Telesterion, the foundations of a temple that was probably built during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161–180 CE) for the wife of Emperor Antoninus Pius, Faustina the Elder, who, after her death in 140 CE in Rome, was deified and honored as “New Demeter”. Shortly before his death, Antoninus Pius (138–161 CE) anointed Marcus Aurelius as his successor to the imperial throne. He wanted to show his gratitude by carrying out works in the Eleusinian Sanctuary, such as the renovation of the Telesterion and the construction of the temple of Faustina. The temple formed a portico with six columns between pilasters on its facade. The cell was small with dimensions of 18×12 m, and was covered with a dome with a diameter of 2.50 m. The portico had a separate roof lower than the main roof, which was not vaulted. The walls of the cell were covered with marble and the floor was paved with large square slabs. The western

wall of the temple abutted the Lykourgean Wall, which, at its northwest corner, joined the west of the hill. No evidence was found inside that would confirm the existence of a cult statue. The building, built 4.10 m higher than the terrace, at the end of a monumental ascending staircase, constructed to serve the access to it, was a particularly impressive example of Roman architecture of the imperial period.

Temple of Sabina

East of the Temple of Faustina, the remains of another temple, also from the Roman period, are preserved. According to the prevailing view, the temple was dedicated to the wife of Emperor Hadrian, Sabina, as a sign of respect. The space where the temple was built is an artificially shaped plane with dimensions of 14.10×11.20 m, which was approximately half formed by the quarrying of the rocky hill. Due to the large difference in elevation between its floor and the level of the Processional Street, to the east, but mainly to facilitate the ascent, a ten-step staircase was constructed that occupied the entire entrance. It is a four-column temple “in parastasis” with a shallow portico and an almost square nave. Its eastern pediment bore a sculptural decoration on the theme of the abduction of Persephone by Pluto, which copied, on a smaller scale, some of the figures of the western pediment of the Parthenon. Unfortunately, no fragment survives of the central figures of the composition, namely Persephone and Pluto. However, parts of sculptures depicting two goddesses, Athena and Artemis, who accompanied the young daughter of Demeter, survive. The goddess Athena wears a helmet and her characteristic *aegis* (shield), while the goddess Artemis has her quiver hanging. The scene of the abduction is also watched by other figures who are identified with heroes and heroines of Eleusis and Athens. Among them, we can easily identify Cecrops and his daughter Ersis, who are presented in exactly the same way as in the corresponding complex of the western pediment of the Parthenon. Plaster copies of these sculptures, known as the “Parthenoneia”, were presented in the permanent exhibition of the Archaeological Museum of Eleusis. The request of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Western Attica to the National Archaeological Museum for the long-term loan of the surviving original sculptures, which are exhibited in its permanent exhibition, was approved and they were recently transferred to the Museum of Eleusis with the aim of a complete presentation of the composition during the museum’s re-exhibition.

Bouleuterion

In the southern courtyard of the Telesterion, in the southeastern corner of the Lykourgeion precinct, the foundations of a rectangular building of the 4th century BCE are preserved, identified with the Bouleuterion (“Parliament”), in which the Sacred Senate probably met. It consists of three rooms, of which the middle one was semicircular at the back. On its facade were erected votive columns in honor of persons who had offered services to the Sanctuary. In Roman times, this building was replaced by a portico, from which the stylobate of its columns is visible today. To a second building, of the same or later period, belong the remains of two concentric semicircles in the area of the central and western hall of the Bouleuterion of the 4th century BCE. The inner semicircle was stepped, while the outer one had a facade with two pilasters at the ends and five columns between them. It is a building in the form of an

odeon that was probably used as a Roman Parliament. Two pedestals for statues, preserved at the ends of the opening of the inner semicircle, are apparently later additions to its facade. At this point, the visitor can head southwest, towards the Archaeological Museum on the southern slope of the hill of the ancient acropolis, or pass through the gate of the Lykourgean Wall (South Pillar) and head east, outside the precincts of the Sanctuary.

Roman House

A few meters below the courtyard of the Archaeological Museum is a large rectangular building from the 2nd century CE, known as the Roman House. It is a two-story luxurious house, which is one of the private residences of prominent people that were built in Roman times outside the fortified area of the Sanctuary. The northern wall of the house was the Peisistrateion Wall with the rock below it. It has dimensions of 26.50×13.50 m, and consists of small rectangular rooms, organized around a square atrium with a small marble tank (*impluvium*) in the center, and a mosaic floor. The northern rooms are better preserved, which have fresco decoration and mosaic floors, decorated with geometric motifs. They probably constituted the reception and dining areas for visitors (*tablinum*). On the eastern side of the atrium there was a staircase, leading to the second floor. A second courtyard on the southern side, perhaps, served as a garden and as a place to watch the games that were held in the adjacent stadium. The privileged position, as well as a sleeper originating from the tiling of the roof and bearing the inscription in Greek IERA ELEUSINOS ("Sacred/Sanctuaries of Eleusis"), indicate its use as a residence for a member of the priesthood of the Eleusinian Sanctuary.

Sacred House

Outside the South Pillar, to the southeast of it, on a terrace oriented from north to south, remains of a post-Geometric building survive, which was considered to have been dedicated to the worship of a hero-ancestor who lived there, and for this reason it was characterized as a Sacred House. The tomb found east of the house probably belonged to him. It consists of a series of rooms that looked out onto a long corridor with a paved courtyard in front. Remains of a built bench are preserved in the northernmost room, and remains of a built cistern in the middle one. The large urn vases, characteristic of the performance of sacrifices, found in the two smaller rooms, testify that the building served cultic purposes. At the beginning of the 6th century BCE, the Sacred House was replaced by a small square hall with an altar that was built in front of the wall of the courtyard and had a floor covered with ash. In the area of a later altar in front of the hall, fragments of black-figure vases and clay figurines in an extensive layer of ash prove the continuation of religious rituals. In the time of Peisistratus, the hall was destroyed and a precinct built with impressive polygonal masonry surrounded the ruins of the earlier buildings. In the same period, a small porin temple was constructed on the ruins of the Sacred House, from which the small marble statue of the "Fleeing Maiden", exhibited in the Archaeological Museum of Eleusis, probably originates.

Mithraeum

At the southern end of the eastern side of the polygonal enclosure of the Sacred House, and in contact with it, a

building was constructed in Roman times which, due to its peculiar interior, refers to the typology of the places of worship of Mithras, and for this reason was interpreted by the excavators as a Mithraeum. The Mithraea were the places where the followers of the Indo-Iranian god Mithras, the main deity of a mystical cult that flourished in the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE in the Roman Empire, gathered. The cult of Mithras found numerous and loyal followers among the soldiers of the Roman legions, who spread it throughout Europe, as they moved during the wars. The building consists of a rectangular room with two large elongated built pedestals on the long sides, to which small stairs led. On another built pedestal, at the back of the room, the statue of the god was probably placed. At the entrance to the Mithraeum, on the eastern side, a marble propylon of classical times stood in second use. This Doric propylon with two columns "in parastasis" on the facade is identical to the monumental propylon that adorned the Peisistratius North Pillar, as early as the 5th century BCE, which was demolished in the mid-1st century BCE. The propylon was kept in a safe place and reused in the Mithraeum, probably during the reign of Emperor Augustus. In Roman times, the official religion gradually evolved, as the result of the influences it received after the conquest of other peoples with different cultures and religions, which spread easily. In Eleusis, in fact, the last Hierophant from Thespieae had the rank of Father in the Mithraic Mysteries.

Gymnasium

A little further east, the foundations of a large rectangular building with a peristyle central courtyard, side rooms and a small propylon on the facade are visible, dating back to Roman times. From the ground plan, the building was interpreted as a Gymnasium, the main sports area for young people, essential in all ancient cities and sanctuaries. The courtyard was the exercise area, while the side rooms were used for teaching and as a training area for athletes.

Public Buildings

Continuing north, the visitor encounters public buildings constructed in Roman times. In contact with the outer side of the Lykourgeion and Pericleion Walls, cisterns and fountains were constructed to serve the multitude of pilgrims. The complex of cisterns consists of four rectangular spaces, built with loose stones reinforced with bricks. On the eastern side, buttresses have been constructed to strengthen the walls against hydrostatic pressures. Next to the cisterns, a complex of fountains that were fed by them is preserved. It consists of six compartments of similar masonry to that of the cisterns. On the eastern side, buttresses can be seen that survive at a very low height. The structures probably date from the time of Emperor Hadrian (117–138 CE), as does the large underground Roman cistern on the eastern side of the Great Propylaea. They are part of the program of large and small-scale hydraulic works in the Sanctuary and in the city of Eleusis.

Further north, in the area outside the eastern extension of the wall, which was significantly reinforced during Roman times, remains of buildings from the same era are preserved. Their use is also related to serving the needs of the large number of pilgrims, who came to the Sanctuary. Remains of bath facilities with a hypocaust heating system (*suspensurae*) are visible southeast of the Fountain; this is an underground low space with rows of clay pillars,

supporting a floor of clay slabs. The hot air produced by a heating furnace (*praefurnium*) was channeled into this space, and in this way the floors of the rooms above were heated. The Thermae, as these bath facilities are known, had cold (*frigidarium*), lukewarm (*tepidarium*) and hot (*caldarium*) bath rooms, so that the body could gradually adapt from the temperature of the cold bath to that of the hot bath and vice versa. The Thermae complex was also completed by areas of recreation, wellness and social gatherings.

The buildings in the area south of the Thermae, due to their layout and the findings, have been interpreted as Hostels that served the short stay of the faithful, during the celebration of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Leaving the Guesthouses and the Baths behind, the visitors, heading northwest, passes through the eastern triumphal arch and returns to the Roman Courtyard, from where their tour of the archaeological site began.

Conclusion

The area and city of Eleusis is continuously inhabited since the Neolithic times, as it is evident by the local artifacts, exhibited at its Archaeological Museum, located inside the Archaeological Site of Eleusis. Eleusis had been famous to the Greco-Roman world for the religious myth of goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone, connected so to the rituals of Eleusinian Mysteries. Thereby, Eleusis had become one of the most important sacred cities of antiquity, for more than a thousand years. Nowadays, people from all over the world visit Eleusis, and especially the Sanctuary of Demeter (indicatively, more than 43,500 visitors in 2025), to admire the cultural monuments of the Greco-Roman antiquity and their ancient glory.

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