



A Sanctuary in the Hora of Illyrian Apollonia

Excavations at the Bonjakët Site (2004–2006)

Edited by
Jack L. Davis, Sharon R. Stocker, Iris Pojani, and Vangjel Dimo

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OF ILLYRIAN APOLLONIA

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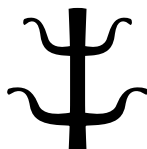
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CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures</i>	IX
<i>List of Tables</i>	XIX
<i>Preface</i>	
THE BONJAKËT SITE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE	1
Jack L. Davis, Sharon R. Stocker, Vangjel Dimo, and Iris Pojani	

Part 1 THE EXCAVATION

<i>Chapter 1</i>	
A HISTORY OF EXPLORATION AT THE BONJAKËT SITE	9
Jack L. Davis, Sharon R. Stocker, Vangjel Dimo, and Iris Pojani	
<i>Appendix</i>	
EXCAVATION REPORT ON SECTOR “N” (1960): PRELIMINARY REPORT	17
Skënder Anamali†	
<i>Chapter 2</i>	
THE GEOLOGICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING OF THE BONJAKËT SITE	23
Tammie L. Gerke	
<i>Chapter 3</i>	
EXCAVATION AND STRATIGRAPHY	33
Jack L. Davis, Tammie L. Gerke, and Evi Gorogianni	
<i>Appendix</i>	
MICROMORPHOLOGY AND SEDIMENT CHEMISTRY	87
Susan M. Mentzer	

Part II
THE FINDS FROM THE EXCAVATION

<i>Chapter 4</i>	
THE FAUNAL REMAINS	109
Paul Halstead, Valasia Isaakidou, and Vasiliki Tzevelekidi	
<i>Chapter 5</i>	
THE MARINE AND TERRESTRIAL MOLLUSCS: A TAPHONOMIC STUDY	121
Deborah Ruscillo	
<i>Chapter 6</i>	
LANDSCAPE, VEGETATION, AND PLANT USE AT THE BONJAKËT SANCTUARY: MACROBOTANICAL REMAINS FROM THE EXCAVATION	131
Susan E. Allen, with contributions from Evi Margariti	
<i>Chapter 7</i>	
THE POTTERY	145
Kathleen M. Lynch	
<i>Appendix 7.1</i>	
VOTIVE SKYPHOI	255
Kathleen M. Lynch	
<i>Appendix 7.2</i>	
BANDED CLOSED VESSELS	261
Kathleen M. Lynch	
<i>Appendix 7.3</i>	
POSTMEDIEVAL CERAMICS	269
Joanita Vroom	
<i>Appendix 7.4</i>	
BRICK AND TILE	273
Kathleen M. Lynch	
CONCORDANCE	279
Kathleen M. Lynch	
<i>Chapter 8</i>	
THE FIGURINES: A STRATIGRAPHICAL AND TYPOLOGICAL OVERVIEW.	285
Sharon R. Stocker	
<i>Appendix</i>	
ALBANO-RUSSIAN FIGURINES.	385
Sharon R. Stocker	

Chapter 9
 THE SMALL FINDS 403
 Jack L. Davis, Sharon R. Stocker, Hariclia Brecolaki, Maria Perla Colombini, Myrto
 Georgakopoulou, Shpresa Gjoncecaj, Andreas Karydas, Noémi Müller, Erika Ribechini,
 and Allison Sterrett-Krause

Chapter 10
 INSCRIPTIONS 445
 Jack L. Davis and Sharon R. Stocker

Part III
THE HISTORY OF THE BONJAKËT SITE

Chapter 11
 THE TEMPLE, THE HISTORY OF THE SITE, AND CULT PRACTICE 451
 Jack L. Davis, Sharon R. Stocker, and Kathleen M. Lynch

Chapter 12
 THE BONJAKËT SITE IN RETROSPECT 477
 Jack L. Davis, Sharon R. Stocker, Iris Pojani, and Vangjel Dimo

CERAMIC DATES OF DEPOSITS BY TRENCH. 481
 Kathleen M. Lynch

REFERENCES 485

INDEX 499

LIST OF FIGURES

Preface

Figure 0.1. The Bonjakët site viewed from the Apollonia acropolis	2
Figure 0.2. View of the Apollonia acropolis from the Bonjakët site in 1960	2
Figure 0.3. The Bonjakët compound in 1960	3
Figure 0.4. The Bonjakët compound in 2004	3
Figure 0.5. Cleaning the mosaic in 1960	4

Chapter 1

Figure 1.1. ICONOS image of the Apollonia acropolis and the coastal plain to the west, November 28, 2000	10
Figure 1.2. Distribution of Archaic through Classical finds after the end of the 2002 field season of MRAP	11
Figure 1.3. General map of the Bonjakët site and surrounding area	12
Figure 1.4. Plan of the Bonjakët compound and excavated trenches	13
Figure 1.5. Vegetable garden southeast of the house of Nurredin and Pranvera Bonjakët, 2004	14
Figure 1.6. Foundations of the temple exposed in trench 10T just beneath the modern ground level	14

Appendix

Figure 1.7. Complete terracotta with reclining figures	18
Figure 1.8. General trench plan and architectural remains of Anamali's excavations in 1960, with the house of Sejdi Islami (Bonjakët) and excavation trenches	19

Chapter 2

Figure 2.1. Simplified geological map of Albania	25
Figure 2.2. Simplified map of the Albanian coast	27
Figure 2.3. Geological section from Apollonia to the Adriatic Sea	28

Chapter 3

Figure 3.1. Trench plan of the Bonjakët excavations	34
---	----

Figure 3.2. The house of Hamdi Bonjakët	35
Figure 3.3. The house of Nurredin Bonjakët	35
Figure 3.4. Section of the western wall of trench 01T	36
Figure 3.5. The road scarp of trench 01T	38
Figure 3.6. Trench 01T in 2004	38
Figure 3.7. Trench 01T. The lowest level reached in 2005	39
Figure 3.8. Trench 01T. Dense deposit of pottery and figurines	39
Figure 3.9. Section of the northern wall of trench 02T	42
Figure 3.10. Trench 02T. Start of the excavation	43
Figure 3.11. Section of the northern wall of trench 03T	44
Figure 3.12. Placement of micromorphology samples from the southern wall of trench 03T	45
Figure 3.13. Trench 03T. Area at start of excavation	46
Figure 3.14. Trench 03T. Layer of limestone chips	46
Figure 3.15. Trench 03T. Haystack pole support	47
Figure 3.16. Trench 03T. Sgraffito rim. 15th century A.D.	47
Figure 3.17. Trench 04T. View from southwest at start of excavation	49
Figure 3.18. Trench 04T. Small marble head (SF4054) from grave relief	49
Figure 3.19. Section of the southern wall of trench 05T	51
Figure 3.20. Trenches 05T and 10T. Pranvera Bonjakët's garden	52
Figure 3.21. Trench 10T. First blocks of temple's foundation exposed.	52
Figure 3.22. Section of a portion of the western wall of trench 07T	54
Figure 3.23. Trenches 06T–09T at start of excavation	55
Figure 3.24. Trenches 06T, 07T, and 08T. In situ wall with part of the Artemis stele left of the threshold	55
Figure 3.25. Trenches 06T and 08T. Crude threshold from southwest	56
Figure 3.26. Trench 08T. Small column wedged under a fallen block	56
Figure 3.27. Section of a portion of the western wall of trench 11T	58
Figure 3.28. Trench 11T. Western face of temple foundations, near their southwestern corner	59
Figure 3.29. Section of the southern wall of trench 12T	62
Figure 3.30. Trench 12T. Top of the bottom course of the stereobate	63
Figure 3.31. Trench 12T. Pebble and tile floor associated with deposit C at bottom.	63
Figure 3.32. Trench 12T. Large boulder on top of lowest course of stereobate	64
Figure 3.33. Trench 13T. Kiln supports on clay floor.	66
Figure 3.34. Trench 13T. Masses of brick and tile above floor	67
Figure 3.35. Trench 13T. Arched brick	67
Figure 3.36. Trench 14T. Foundations of the temple	69
Figure 3.37. Section of the eastern wall of trench 15T	71
Figure 3.38. Trench 15T. Groundwater at lowest level. 15T-042.	72
Figure 3.39. Trench 15T. Large pieces of tile and carbonized wood. 15T-038	72
Figure 3.40. Trench 15T. Altar and earlier debris under stereobate.	72
Figure 3.41. Trench 15T. Trench dug into Deposit L	72
Figure 3.42. Trench 15T. Floor of hard-packed soil and crushed pieces of limestone	73
Figure 3.43. Trench 15T. Pavement of pieces of worked limestone	73
Figure 3.44. Trench 15T. Pit for mixing lime visible in scarp	74
Figure 3.45. Section of the eastern wall of trench 16T	77

Figure 3.46. Trench 16T. “Wall” at bottom of trench	78
Figure 3.47. Trench 16T. Worked sandstone block	78
Figure 3.48. Section of the southern wall of trench 17T	80
Figure 3.49. Trench 17T. Lowest level of trench	83

Appendix

Figure 3.50. Main features of the trench 03T deposits	91
Figure 3.51. Main features of the trench 15T deposits	94
Figure 3.52. Floors in trench 15T	95
Figure 3.53. Deposits in trench 16T.	97
Figure 3.54. Geogenic deposits in trench 17T	99
Figure 3.55. Anthropogenic materials in trench 17T	101

Chapter 4

Figure 4.1. Detail of Worked Astragali. a) SF5163, b) SF5446, and c) SF6038	116
---	-----

Chapter 5

Figure 5.1. Excavated sample of molluscs by group.	122
Figure 5.2. Morphological differences between <i>Cerastoderma edule</i> (left) and <i>Cerastoderma glaucum</i> (right)	124

Chapter 6

Figure 6.1. <i>Hordeum vulgare</i> (barley) grains, magnification 26.4x.	136
Figure 6.2. <i>Ficus carica</i> (fig) fruit fragment. Magnification 26.3x.	137

Chapter 7

Figure 7.1. a) Contents of trench 1 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by counts (top), b) Contents of trench 1 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by weights (bottom)	147
Figure 7.2. Trench 01T, Deposit E	151
Figure 7.3. Trench 01T, Deposit E (continued)	152
Figure 7.4. Trench 01T, Deposit D	154
Figure 7.5. Trench 01T, Deposit C	156
Figure 7.6. Trench 01T, Deposit B	158
Figure 7.7. Trench 01T, Deposit B (continued)	159
Figure 7.8. Trench 01T, Deposit A	161
Figure 7.9. a) Contents of trench 2 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by counts (left), b) Contents of trench 2 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by weights (right).	162
Figure 7.10. Trench 02T, Deposits B and A	163
Figure 7.11. a) Contents of trench 3 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by counts (top), b) Contents of trench 3 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by weights (bottom)	167
Figure 7.12. Trench 03T, Deposit D.	168
Figure 7.13. Trench 03T, Deposit C.	170
Figure 7.14. Trench 03T, Deposit C (continued)	171
Figure 7.15. Trench 03T, Deposit B.	172

Figure 7.16. Trench 03T, Deposit B (continued)	173
Figure 7.17. Trench 03T, Deposit A.	175
Figure 7.18. a) Contents of trench 4 deposit expressed as a percentage of the deposit by counts (left), b) Contents of trench 4 deposit expressed as a percentage of the deposit by weights (right)	176
Figure 7.19. a) Contents of trench 5 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by counts (top), b) Contents of trench 5 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by weights (bottom)	179
Figure 7.20. Trench 05T, Deposit F.	180
Figure 7.21. Trench 05T, Deposit E.	181
Figure 7.22. Trench 05T, Deposit C.	182
Figure 7.23. Trench 05T, Deposit D.	183
Figure 7.24. Trench 05T, Deposit B.	184
Figure 7.25. Trench 05T, Deposit A.	185
Figure 7.26. Trench 05T, Deposit A (continued)	186
Figure 7.27. Trenches 06T, 07T, 08T, and 09T	187
Figure 7.28. Trenches 06T, 07T, 08T, and 09T (continued).	188
Figure 7.29. a) Contents of trench 11 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by counts (top), b) Contents of trench 11 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by weights (bottom).	191
Figure 7.30. Trench 11T, Deposit F.	192
Figure 7.31. Trench 11T, Deposit E.	192
Figure 7.32. Trench 11T, Deposit C.	194
Figure 7.33. Trench 11T, Deposit B.	194
Figure 7.34. Trench 11T, Deposit A.	195
Figure 7.35. a) Contents of trench 12 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by counts (top), b) Contents of trench 12 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by weights (bottom).	198
Figure 7.36. Trench 12T, Deposit E.	199
Figure 7.37. Trench 12T, Deposits D and C.	200
Figure 7.38. Trench 12T, Deposit B.	201
Figure 7.39. Trench 12T, Deposit A.	202
Figure 7.40. Trench 12T, Deposits F and G.	204
Figure 7.41. a) Contents of trench 13 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by counts (left), b) Contents of trench 13 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by weights (right)	205
Figure 7.42. Trench 13T.	206
Figure 7.43. a) Contents of trench 14 deposit expressed as a percentage of the deposit by counts (left), b) Contents of trench 14 deposit expressed as a percentage of the deposit by weights (right)	207
Figure 7.44. Trench 14T.	208
Figure 7.45. a) Contents of trench 15 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by counts (top), b) Contents of trench 15 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by weights (bottom).	214
Figure 7.46. Trench 15T, Deposit N.	215
Figure 7.47. Trench 15T, Deposit M	216
Figure 7.48. Trench 15T, Deposit L.	217
Figure 7.49. Trench 15T, Deposit K.	218
Figure 7.50. Trench 15T, Deposits J and I	219
Figure 7.51. Trench 15T, Deposit H.	219
Figure 7.52. Trench 15T, Deposit G.	220
Figure 7.53. Trench 15T, Deposit F.	221

Figure 7.54. Trench 15T, Deposit E.	222
Figure 7.55. Trench 15T, Deposit D.	223
Figure 7.56. Trench 15T, Deposit C.	224
Figure 7.57. Trench 15T, Deposit C (continued)	225
Figure 7.58. Trench 15T, Deposit C (continued)	226
Figure 7.59. Trench 15T, Deposit B.	229
Figure 7.60. a) Contents of trench 16 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by counts (top), b) Contents of trench 16 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by weights (bottom).	233
Figure 7.61. Trench 16T, Deposits I and H	234
Figure 7.62. Trench 16T, Deposit H (continued)	236
Figure 7.63. Trench 16T, Deposit G.	237
Figure 7.64. Trench 16T, Deposit F.	238
Figure 7.65. Trench 16T, Deposit F (continued)	240
Figure 7.66. Trench 16T, Deposit F (continued)	241
Figure 7.67. Trench 16T, sample of votive objects in Deposits F, G, H, and I (16:40) and sample of tile (16:41 and 16:42)	242
Figure 7.68. Trench 16T, Deposit E.	244
Figure 7.69. Trench 16T, Deposit A.	245
Figure 7.70. a) Contents of trench 17 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by counts (top), b) Contents of trench 17 deposits expressed as a percentage of each deposit by weights (bottom)	247
Figure 7.71. Trench 17T, Deposit C.	248
Figure 7.72. Trench 17T, Deposit B.	249
Figure 7.73. Trench 17T, Deposit A.	250

Appendix 7.1

Figure 7.74. Votive skyphoi of the first half of the 6th century B.C.	256
Figure 7.75. Votive skyphoi of the Late Archaic Period	258
Figure 7.76. Votive skyphoi of the Late Archaic Period (continued)	259
Figure 7.77. Votive skyphoi of the Classical period	259
Figure 7.78. Votive cups of the Classical–Hellenistic periods	260

Appendix 7.2

Figure 7.79. Banded hydriai.	263
Figure 7.80. Banded amphorai	264
Figure 7.81. Banded closed vessel bases	266

Appendix 7.3

Figure 7.82. Postmedieval ceramics	271
--	-----

Appendix 7.4

Figure 7.83. Brick A7.4:1	274
Figure 7.84. Brick A7.4:2	275
Figure 7.85. Tile.	276

Figure 7.86. Tile (continued)	278
---	-----

Chapter 8

Figure 8.1. Washing figurines in 1960	286
Figure 8.2. Double reclining figures, from the 1960 excavations: Type 1 a) AR03-15; Type 2 b) AR01-26 and c) AR01-30; and Type 3 d) AR03-07 and e) AR01-27	288
Figure 8.3. Figurines that refer to the reclining figures composition, from the 1960 excavations: a) Terracotta slab with phiale (AR02-18) and b) Eros embracing human figure (AR05-13)	291
Figure 8.4. Female protomai and other female figurine types from the 1960 excavations: a) Protome (AR18-24), b) Seated figure (AR05-03), and c) Standing figure (AR05-09)	292
Figure 8.5. Figurines from trench 01T: a) SF3902, b) SF3959, c) SF3960, d) SF3961, e) SF3905, f) SF3906, g) SF3907, h) SF3910, i) SF3911, j) SF3912, k) SF3913, and l) SF3915.	313
Figure 8.6. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF3916, b) SF3917, c) SF3920, d) SF3922, e) SF3923, f) SF3925, g) SF3926, h) SF3928, i) SF3947, j) SF3948, k) SF3952, l) SF3954, and m) SF4552.	315
Figure 8.7. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF4553, b) SF3974, c) SF3975, d) SF3976, e) SF3977, f) SF4602, g) SF3955, h) SF3956, i) SF3957, j) SF3958, k) SF4369, l) SF4025, and m) SF4026	317
Figure 8.8. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF4027, b) SF4028, c) SF4029, d) SF4690, e) SF4693, f) SF4694, g) SF4695, h) SF4696, i) SF4697, j) SF4698, and k) SF4699	319
Figure 8.9. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF4701, b) SF4704, c) SF4709, d) SF4712, e) SF4715, f) SF4734, g) SF4735, h) SF4737, i) SF4740, j) SF4754, k) SF4756, l) SF4762, and m) SF4763.	321
Figure 8.10. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF4764, b) SF4768, c) SF4769, d) SF4770, e) SF4776, f) SF4779, g) SF4780, h) SF4782, i) SF4784, j) SF4786, and k) SF4790	323
Figure 8.11. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF4792, b) SF4793, c) SF4796, d) SF4797, e) SF4798, f) SF4799, g) SF4118, h) SF4119, i) SF4124, j) SF4125, and k) SF4127	325
Figure 8.12. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF4133, b) SF4134, c) SF4138, d) SF5402, e) SF5404, f) SF5406, g) SF5410, h) SF5411, i) SF5412, j) SF5413, and k) SF5414	327
Figure 8.13. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF5415, b) SF5416, c) SF5417, d) SF5418, e) SF5419, f) SF5420, g) SF5421, h) SF5422, i) SF5423, j) SF5424, k) SF5425, l) SF5426, and m) SF5427.	329
Figure 8.14. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF5428, b) SF5429, c) SF5430, d) SF5210, e) SF5211, f) SF5212, g) SF5213, h) SF5062, i) SF4142, and j) SF4143	331
Figure 8.15. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF5244, b) SF5249, c) SF5250, d) SF5251, e) SF5068, f) SF5070, g) SF5071, h) SF5072, i) SF5073, j) SF5091, and k) SF5092	333
Figure 8.16. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF5096, b) SF5099, c) SF5100, d) SF5101, e) SF5102, f) SF5103, g) SF5104, h) SF5118, i) SF5119, j) SF5443, k) SF5447, and l) SF5448	335
Figure 8.17. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF5451, b) SF5452, c) SF5458, d) SF5460, e) SF4181, f) SF4183, g) SF4186, h) SF4187, i) SF4188, j) SF4193, and k) SF4195	337
Figure 8.18. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF4196, b) SF4197, c) SF4198, d) SF4146, e) SF4150, f) SF4151, g) SF4152, h) SF4153, i) SF4154, and j) SF4156	339
Figure 8.19. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF4157, b) SF4160, c) SF4163, d) SF4166, e) SF4168, f) SF4174, g) SF4175, h) SF4176, i) SF4177, j) SF4178, and k) SF4179	341
Figure 8.20. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF6695, b) SF5161, c) SF5166, d) SF5167, e) SF5168, f) SF5169, g) SF5170, h) SF5171, i) SF5172, j) SF5173, and k) SF5174	343
Figure 8.21. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF5175, b) SF5176, c) SF5177, d) SF4201, e) SF4203, f) SF4204, g) SF4205, h) SF4207, i) SF4209, j) SF4213, k) SF4214, l) SF4215, and m) SF4216	345
Figure 8.22. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF4220, b) SF4222, c) SF5378, d) SF5223, e) SF5224, f) SF5226, g) SF5227, h) SF5230, i) SF5231, j) SF5232, k) SF5233, l) SF5235, and m) SF5236	347
Figure 8.23. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF5237, b) SF5238, c) SF5239, d) SF6657, e) SF6658, f) SF4271, g) SF4272, h) SF4273, i) SF6666, j) SF4306, k) SF5903, l) SF5909, and m) SF5910	349

Figure 8.24. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF5912, b) SF5913, c) SF5920, d) SF5921, e) SF5922, f) SF5925, g) SF5927, h) SF5954, i) SF5955, j) SF5959, k) SF5962, and l) SF5966	351
Figure 8.25. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF5127, b) SF5128, c) SF5145, d) SF5152, e) SF5154, f) SF5155, g) SF5157, h) SF5160, i) SF5284, j) SF6619, k) SF6620, l) SF5338, m) SF5339, and n) SF534	353
Figure 8.26. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF5349, b) SF6600, c) SF5501, d) SF5502, e) SF5503, f) SF5504, g) SF5506, h) SF5510, i) SF5511, j) SF5512, k) SF5513, l) SF5514, m) SF5515, and n) SF5516	355
Figure 8.27. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF5521, b) SF5522, c) SF5523, d) SF5524, e) SF5531, f) SF5541, g) SF5542, h) SF5543, i) SF5544, j) SF5545, k) SF5546, l) SF6573, m) SF5551, and n) SF5553	357
Figure 8.28. Figurines from trench 01T (continued): a) SF5554, b) SF5630, c) SF5643, d) SF5644, e) SF5857, f) SF5880, g) SF5881, h) SF6531, and i) SF5865.	359
Figure 8.29. Figurines from trench 03T: a) SF3930, b) SF3933, c) SF3936, d) SF3937, e) SF3943, f) SF3945, g) SF3946, h) SF3989, i) SF4384, j) SF4005, and k) SF4006.	361
Figure 8.30. Figurines from trench 03T (continued): a) SF4011, b) SF4452, c) SF4013, d) SF4019, e) SF4103, f) SF4104, g) SF6703, h) SF5598, i) SF5599, j) SF5620, k) SF5675, and l) SF5693	363
Figure 8.31. Figurine from trench 04T: a) SF4056	365
Figure 8.32. Figurines from trench 05T: a) SF4046, b) SF5986, c) SF4234, d) SF4240, e) SF6681, f) SF4315, and g) SF6635 and SF6636.	365
Figure 8.33. Figurines from trench 05T (continued): a) SF6650, b) SF6661, and c) SF6663	367
Figure 8.34. Figurines from trench 11T: a) SF5751, b) SF5756 and SF5757, c) SF5760, d) SF5763, and e) SF5780	367
Figure 8.35. Figurines from trench 12T: a) SF5323, b) SF5328, c) SF5489, d) SF5493, e) SF5494, f) SF6710, g) SF5557, h) SF5563, i) SF5567, j) SF5572, and k) SF5587	369
Figure 8.36. Figurines from trench 12T (continued): a) SF5975 and b) SF5978	371
Figure 8.37. Figurine from trench 13T: a) SF5257	371
Figure 8.38. Figurines from trench 14T: a) SF5743, b) SF5745, c) SF5746, and d) SF5747.	371
Figure 8.39. Figurines from trench 15T: a) SF6291, b) SF6293, c) SF6298, d) SF6302, e) SF6304, f) SF6305, g) SF6307, h) SF6308, i) SF6309, j) SF6310, and k) SF6311	373
Figure 8.40. Figurines from trench 15T (continued): a) SF6317, b) SF6319, c) SF5984, d) SF6077, e) SF6078, f) SF6079, g) SF6080, h) SF6082, i) SF6083, j) SF6084, k) SF6085, l) SF6098, m) SF6100, and n) SF6705	375
Figure 8.41. Figurines from trench 15T (continued): a) SF6141, b) SF6175, c) SF6706, d) SF6188 and SF6199, e) SF6189, f) SF6380, g) SF6387, h) SF6394, i) SF6533, and j) SF6567.	377
Figure 8.42. Figurines from trench 15T (continued): a) SF6554, b) SF6592, and c) SF6704	379
Figure 8.43. Figurines from trench 16T: a) SF6013, b) SF6031, c) SF6035, and d) SF6047.	379
Figure 8.44. Figurines from trench 16T (continued): a) SF6253, b) SF6256, and c) SF6260	381
Figure 8.45. Figurines from trench 16T (continued): a) SF6262, b) SF6265, c) SF6266, d) SF6279, e) SF6331, f) SF6349, g) SF6405, h) SF6355, and g) SF6359.	383
Figure 8.46. Figurine from trench 17T: a) SF6215	383

Appendix

Figure 8.47. Figurines from 1960 excavation: a) AR01-12, b) AR01-19, c) AR01-20, and d) AR01-26	387
Figure 8.48. Figurines from 1960 excavation (continued): a) AR01-27, b) AR01-28, c) AR01-30, and d) AR01-32	389
Figure 8.49. Figurines from 1960 excavation (continued): a) AR01-33, b) AR01-34, c) AR01-35, d) AR01-36, e) AR02-04, f) AR02-07, and g) AR02-18	391
Figure 8.50. Figurines from 1960 excavation (continued): a) AR02-19, b) AR02-21, c) AR02-27, d) AR03-07, e) AR03-15, and f) AR03-17	393
Figure 8.51. Figurines from 1960 excavation (continued): a) AR05-03, b) AR05-09, c) AR05-13, d) AR06-06, and e) AR06-13	395

Figure 8.52. Figurines from 1960 excavation (continued): a) AR06-22, b) AR07-13, c) AR08-06, d)AR08-32, e) AR09-04, and f)AR11-01	397
Figure 8.53. Figurines from 1960 excavation (continued): a) AR11-19, b) AR11-23, c) AR11-31, d) AR14-63, and e) AR17-07	399
Figure 8.54. Figurines from 1960 excavation (continued): a) AR17-12, b) AR18-23, c) AR18-24, d) AR18-26, e) AR18-29, f) AR18-30, and g) AR18-31	401

Chapter 9

Figure 9.1. SF6415: Alabaster lid with gilding	404
Figure 9.2. Bronze finds: a) SF4236, b) SF6646, c) SF5555, d)SF4224, e) SF6040, f) SF5849, g) SF6259, h) SF6244, and i) SF6029	405
Figure 9.3. Iron finds: a) SF6033, b) SF6043, c) SF6237 d) SF6241, e) SF6250, f) SF6251, g) SF6255, h) SF6261, i) SF6322, j) SF6046, k) SF6238, l) SF6269, m) SF6252, n) SF6254, o) SF5800, p) SF4080, q) SF4081, r) SF5619, s) SF6162, t) SF5287, u) SF5090, v) SF6133, w) SF4092, and x) SF6172	407
Figure 9.4. Lead finds: a) SF6198 , b) SF6676, c) SF5729, and d) SF4010	408
Figure 9.5. Glass finds: a) SF6243, b) SF6633, c) SF6137, d) SF4239, e) SF6245, f) SF6539, and g) SF5738	410
Figure 9.6. Glass finds (continued): a) SF6647, b) SF4711a, c) SF5596, d) SF6555, e) SF6574, f) SF4035, g) SF5603, and h) SF6537	412
Figure 9.7. Glass finds (continued): a) SF6557, b) SF4711b, c) SF6289, and d) SF4232	414
Figure 9.8. Terracotta finds: a) SF4114, b) SF6623, c) SF4042, d) SF4253, e) SF6321, f) SF6263, g) SF4344, h) SF5258, i) SF5988, j) SF6074, k) SF6147, l) SF6397, and m) SF4262.	418
Figure 9.9. Terracotta finds continued; a) SF5657, b) SF5660, c) SF6075, d) SF6139, e) SF6424, f) SF4098, g) SF6622, h) SF6320, i) SF6529, j) SF5397, and k) SF5793	419
Figure 9.10. a) Reflected light microphotograph of slag SF4089 showing elongated iron silicates (medium gray) in a glassy matrix (dark gray) and porosity (black), b) Reflected light microphotograph of slag SF4089 showing area with a concentration of rounded iron oxides (light gray), c) Reflected light microphotograph of slag SF4089 showing iron prills (round, white), elongated iron silicates (medium gray) and glassy matrix (dark gray), d) Reflected light microphotograph of slag SF3992a showing elongated iron silicates (medium gray) in a glassy matrix (dark gray) and porosity (black). The right part of the image shows a more weathered area, e) Reflected light microphotograph of slag SF3992a showing elongated iron silicates (medium gray), small iron oxide dendrites in the shape of magnetite (light gray) in a glassy matrix (dark gray), f) Reflected light microphotograph of vitrified ceramic SF3992b showing intense rounded porosity, g) Reflected light microphotograph of vitrified ceramic SF3992b showing small iron prills	422
Figure 9.11. a) SF4266: Ivory fragment, b) SF4095: Sample identified as the synthetic pigment Egyptian blue. Scale 1:1	423

Chapter 10

Figure 10.1. Inscriptions: a) SF3035, b) SF4330, c) SF4235, and d) SF4337+SF4338+SF4339	446
---	-----

Chapter 11

Figure 11.1. Plan of the foundations of the temple at Bonjakët	452
Figure 11.2. Area of trench 05T with the foundations of the temple as first exposed in 2004	453
Figure 11.3. The ragged face of projecting blocks in the lowest course of the foundations in trench 15T on the southern side of the temple, from the west	454
Figure 11.4. The setting line on the lowest course of the foundations in trench 11T on the western side of temple (on the most southern block), from the south	454
Figure 11.5. Close-up of setting line on a block in the lowest course of the foundations in trench 11T on the western side of temple, from the north	455

Figure 11.6. Close-up of the probable pry hole in a block in the lowest course of the foundations in trench 15T, from the north	455
Figure 11.7. Rectangular stretchers in the middle course of the foundations in trench 11T on the western side of the temple, near its southwestern corner, from the north	455
Figure 11.8. The outer face of rectangular blocks in the middle course of the foundations in trench 11T near the southwestern corner of the temple, from the northwest	455
Figure 11.9. <i>Anathyrosis</i> on a block in the middle course of the foundations in trench 15T, from the west	456
Figure 11.10. Close-up of the beveling at the upper edge of the block with <i>anathyrosis</i> in trench 15T, from the south.	456
Figure 11.11. Beveling on the upper edge of the southern face of the block with <i>anathyrosis</i> in the middle course of the foundations in trench 15T, from the south	456
Figure 11.12. The southern side of the foundations in trench 15T, showing area of foundation trench	457
Figure 11.13. Two blocks in the upper course of the western face of the foundations in trench 05T/10T, from the south	457
Figure 11.14. Cutting for a T-clamp in two blocks in the upper course of the western face of the foundations in trench 05T/10T	458
Figure 11.15. Close-up of cuttings for the T-clamp in trench 15T	458
Figure 11.16. a) Limestone chips from the working of blocks (SF4097), b) Chips of limestone and sandstone (SF4102), c) Fragment from the side of a limestone block with tool marks (SF4237), d) Corner of a block of fine white limestone with a beveled edge (SF5577), e) Corner of a block of fine white limestone with beveled edge (SF5577)	460
Figure 11.17. a) Corner of a block of fine limestone and fragment with a fascia (SF6161), b) Fragment of a limestone block with <i>anathyrosis</i> (SF6544)	461
Figure 11.18. Column fragments: a) SF4024, b) SF6604, and c) SF6547	462
Figure 11.19. Capital fragments: a) SF6106 and b) SF6334	463
Figure 11.20. Guttae fragments: a) SF5322, b) SF5841, and c) SF6110	464
Figure 11.21. Sima fragment (SF6108)	465
Figure 11.22. Architectural terracottas(?): a) SF4494, b) perhaps an upraised wing of a sphinx or a griffin; SF5573, c) two leaves of a palmette; SF6148, d) probable head of a lion; SF6149, e) SF6340, f) possibly part of an ear; SF6707, g) perhaps drapery from a large figure; SF6711, h) SF5495; and i) part of an eye or eyebrow; SF6713	466
Figure 11.23. a) Architectural sculpture(?), perhaps head of a lion or part of a floral motif (SF6087), b) Two fragments of marble roof tiles (SF6104)	467
Figure 11.24. Fragment of a marble architectural sculpture, probably an akroterion, in the museum at Apollonia	467
Figure 11.25. Built construction near the bottom of trench 16T	470
Figure 11.26. Rim of a tile (16T-016-01) from the construction associated with an Archaic level in trench 16T	470
Figure 11.27. Small polygonal block reused in the upper course of the foundations of the temple	471
Figure 11.28. Tile and other debris in an Archaic stratum beneath the level of the foundations of the temple in trench 15T	471
Figure 11.29. Portable limestone altar (SF6413).	472
Figure 11.30. Fragment of white marble revetment (SF4490)	472
Figure 11.31. The block with a cyma reversa molding by the irrigation ditch near trenches 06T-09T	473
Figure 11.32. Battered block with a cutting for a T-clamp near trenches 06T-09T	473
Figure 11.33. Close-up of the T-clamp	474

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter 3

Table 3.1. Soil units in trench 01T	40
Table 3.2. Probable location of deposition in trench 01T.	41
Table 3.3. Soil units in trench 02T	42
Table 3.4. Soil units in trench 03T	48
Table 3.5. Probable location of deposition in trench 03T.	48
Table 3.6. Soil units in trench 05T	53
Table 3.7. Soil units in trench 11T	60
Table 3.8. Soil units in trench 12T	65
Table 3.9. Soil units in trench 13T	68
Table 3.10. Probable location of deposition in trench 13T	68
Table 3.11. Soil units in trench 15T.	75
Table 3.12. Soil units in trench 16T.	79
Table 3.13. Soil units in trench 17T.	82
Table 3.14. Probable location of deposition in trench 17T	83

Appendix

Table 3.15. Analysis of loose soil samples.	89
---	----

Chapter 4

Table 4.1. Taxonomic Composition of Mammalian Assemblage by Date (MaxAU and MinAU)	110
Table 4.2. Distribution of Mammalian Assemblage by Date and Area of Site (MaxAU and MinAU).	111
Table 4.3. Frequency of Burning, Gnawing, and Working in Mammalian Assemblage by Taxon (MaxAU)	112
Table 4.4. Frequency of Burning, Gnawing, and Working in Mammalian Assemblage by Date (MaxAU)	112
Table 4.5. Frequency of Gnawing/(Digestion) in Mammalian Assemblage from Archaic–Hellenistic Deposits by Area (MaxAU)	113
Table 4.6. Anatomical Representation for Cattle and Sheep/Goat by Date (MinAU)	114
Table 4.7. Anatomical Representation for Sheep/Goat in Archaic–Hellenistic Levels by Area (MinAU)	115

Table 4.8. Maxillary Evidence for Age at Death of Sheep/Goats by Date (MinAU)	117
Table 4.9. Epiphyseal Fusion Evidence for Age at Death of Archaic–Hellenistic Sheep/Goats by Phase (MinAU)	117

Chapter 5

Table 5.1. Mollusc species identified in the Bonjakët assemblage	123
Table 5.2. Specimens found outside the sanctuary compound dating to ancient and modern periods. (complete specimens/ number of fragments)	125
Table 5.3. Specimens found within the sanctuary compound dating to the Archaic period (complete specimens/ fragments)	126
Table 5.4. Specimens found within the sanctuary compound dating to the late Archaic and Classical periods (complete specimens/fragments)	127
Table 5.5. Specimens found within the sanctuary compound dating to the Classical period (complete specimens/ fragments)	127
Table 5.6. Specimens found within the sanctuary compound dating to the Classical and Hellenistic periods (complete specimens/fragments).	128
Table 5.7. Specimens found within the sanctuary compound in ancient and mixed material (complete specimens/ fragments)	129

Chapter 6

Table 6.1. Nonwood botanical remains recovered from flotation samples and hand-collected specimens at Bonjakët sanctuary	132
Table 6.2. Taxa identified among wood charcoal recovered from Bonjakët sanctuary.	133
Table 6.3. Macrobotanical remains from Bonjakët and other sanctuary contexts in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greece and Italy.	135

Chapter 7

Table 7.1. Trench 01T: Diagnostic pottery by deposit	148
Table 7.2. Trench 02T: Diagnostic pottery by deposit	162
Table 7.3. Trench 03T: Diagnostic pottery by deposit	165
Table 7.4. Trenches 05T and 10T: Diagnostic pottery by deposit	177
Table 7.5. Trench 11T: Diagnostic pottery by deposit	189
Table 7.6. Trench 12T: Diagnostic pottery by deposit	197
Table 7.7. Trench 14T: Diagnostic pottery by deposit	207
Table 7.8. Trench 15T: Diagnostic pottery by deposit	210
Table 7.9. Trench 16T: Diagnostic pottery by deposit	231
Table 7.10. Trench 17T: Diagnostic pottery by deposit	246

Chapter 8

Table 8.1. Figurines in trench 01T	312
Table 8.2. Figurines in trench 03T	360
Table 8.3. Figurine in trench 04T	364
Table 8.4. Figurines in trench 05T	364
Table 8.5. Figurines in trench 11T	366
Table 8.6. Figurines in trench 12T	368

Table 8.7. Figurine in trench 13T	370
Table 8.8. Figurines in trench 14T	370
Table 8.9. Figurines in trench 15T	372
Table 8.10. Figurines in trench 16T	378
Table 8.11. Figurines in trench 17T	382
Table 8.12. Fragments of figurines per trench: total and reclining types	384
Table 8.13. Fragments of reclining types in trenches 01T, 03T, and 15T.	384

Appendix

Table 8.14. Figurines from the 1960 excavations.	386
--	-----

Chapter 9

Table 9.1. Bronze finds	425
Table 9.2. Coins	426
Table 9.3. Iron	427
Table 9.4. Lead	429
Table 9.5. Aluminum	429
Table 9.6. Other metal	429
Table 9.7. Glass	430
Table 9.8. Stone	433
Table 9.9. Terracotta	438
Table 9.10. FT-IR spectroscopy; absorption bands related to clay component	441
Table 9.11. Slag	441
Table 9.12. Summary of macroscopic description of artifacts	441
Table 9.13. Averages of area analyses on the EDS-SEM (b.d.l.: below detection limits)	442
Table 9.14. Bone, ivory, and amber	443
Table 9.15. Analyses of pigments	443
Table 9.16. Pigment	444

Preface

THE BONJAKËT SITE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

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In the years 2004–2006, a joint team from the International Centre for Albanian Archaeology in Tirana, Albania, the Institute of Archaeology in Tirana, and the University of Cincinnati conducted excavations in the plain west of the walls of the ancient Greek colony of Apollonia, a short distance to the southwest of the modern village of Pojan (Figs. 0.1, 0.2, and 1.3). The site lies almost entirely within a complex of farm buildings known locally as Bonjakët. The excavation was a continuation of a research project conducted under the auspices of the Mallakstra Regional Archaeological Project (MRAP) from 1998 to 2002.¹

Results were particularly rewarding since a previously unknown monumental temple was discovered and documented; this work has made it possible to describe the rich history of ancient cult practice at the site. The Greek temple, which appears to have been built in the Late Classical period, is only the third to be found at Apollonia.²

MODERN SETTING OF THE ANCIENT REMAINS

The complex of modern buildings at Bonjakët consists of two principal dwellings that were occupied by 14 individuals at the time of our excavations; all were members of two extended families, descended from Hamdi and Sejdi Bonjakët, brothers who, in 1928, in the time of Ahmet Zogu, migrated to the Pojan area from Kosovo (Figs. 0.3 and 0.4).³ The brothers built houses, one of which, although no longer occupied as a residence, still defined the northeastern side of the present Bonjakët compound.

1. Davis et al. 1998, 2006, 2007; Galaty et al. 2004; Runnels et al. 2004; Stocker 2009.

2. The only monumental Greek temple that stands today at Apollonia is the Doric building at Shtyllas, situated on a knoll immediately southeast of the polis center (see, most recently, Quantin 1996; Lenhardt and Quantin 2007, pp. 322–331); the date of its construction is unclear, as is the divinity to whom it was dedicated, although Artemis has been suggested (Lenhardt and Quantin 2007, p. 331). In addition, foundations of a building excavated on the lower acropolis of the city (Hill 104) have been tentatively identified as a temple to Artemis (Praschniker 1922–1924, cols. 35–40; Ceka 1958, p. 217; Dimo, Lenhardt, and Quantin 2007b, pp. 243–244, 246). Elsewhere in Albania, in 2001, a previously unknown temple was located at Spitalla near ancient Epidamnus/Dyrrachium (modern Durrës, hereafter Dyrrachium when in reference to the ancient city; Davis et al. 2003, pp. 61, 80–81). It has now been excavated in the course of several campaigns (Lafe 2004–2005, p. 124), and, in 2003, a second similar temple was found several kilometers farther north at Bisht i Pallës (Ndrenika and Booth 2007, pp. 51–53).

3. Zogu was president (1925–1928), then king (1928–1939) of Albania.



Figure 0.1. The Bonjakët site viewed from the Apollonia acropolis. Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati



Figure 0.2. View of the Apollonia acropolis from the Bonjakët site in 1960. Courtesy Institute of Archaeology, Tirana



Figure 0.3. The Bonjakët compound in 1960. Courtesy Institute of Archaeology, Tirana



Figure 0.4. The Bonjakët compound in 2004. Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati



Figure 0.5. Cleaning the mosaic in 1960. Courtesy Institute of Archaeology, Tirana

In 2003, members of our team became aware of plans being formulated by the Ministry of Transportation of Albania to improve communications between Tirana and Vlora. An extension to the national highway of Albania was planned that would bypass the city of Fier. The highway would run west of the acropolis of Apollonia, through its lower city and cemeteries, and would clip the eastern edge of the site of Bonjakët. In one fell swoop, a quiet, isolated, and largely vacant rural landscape would be exposed to the hustle and bustle of economic development.

Immediate action was required. Steps were taken to inform the Ministry of Transportation and other relevant parties in Tirana that extensive damage would be done to the antiquities of Apollonia should the highway be constructed along the proposed course. At the same time, an initiative was taken to mitigate the losses that would be incurred if the road was built as planned: excavations at the Bonjakët site began in September 2004, and, shortly thereafter, fields along the proposed route of the highway were intensively surveyed, and test excavations were initiated by the rescue unit of the International Centre for Albanian Archaeology in Tirana.

THE BONJAKËT SITE IN ITS LANDSCAPE

The results of our archaeological investigations at the Bonjakët site reinforce those of geological studies previously conducted in the plain west of the acropolis of Apollonia. Eric Fouache and his colleagues had identified several ancient beach fronts there, concluding that, during “toute l’Antiquité la plaine littorale se limite au piémont des collines molassiques, à une bande de deux à trois kilomètres de large qui borde des marécages et des lagunes séparées de la mer par un cordon sableux.” This landscape remained relatively stable from the 7th century B.C. until the 7th century A.D.⁴ The discovery in his core PS3 of a beach contemporary with the Greek colony allows the reconstruction of an ancient coastline in a position that is only ca. 1 km to the west of the Bonjakët site.

4. Fouache et al. 2004, p. 259.

An ancient coastline in this position is, in fact, precisely what has been predicted on the basis of intensive survey.⁵ It is also clear that by the Hellenistic period, a substantial suburb had been established outside the walls of the city in a 1 km-wide coastal plain west of the acropolis of Apollonia.⁶ Concentrations of ancient artifacts extend only a bit more than 1 km west of the acropolis walls before stopping abruptly at a point where the elevation of the plain becomes almost imperceptibly lower. It is likely that this falloff in density marks the edge of what in antiquity had been lagoons and marshes lying between Apollonia and the open sea.⁷

THE EXCAVATIONS IN BRIEF

We were drawn to the Bonjakët site by finds made in the course of surface investigations in 2002. Later we discovered that there had already been excavations at the site in 1960 (Fig. 0.5).⁸ Three campaigns (2004–2006) then set those discoveries in a broader cultural context, adding greatly to what was known about the area west of the Apollonia acropolis. The recent excavations have also emphasized the extraordinary and singular importance of the Bonjakët site for our understanding of the first centuries of Greek colonization in the Adriatic.

A large stone temple was built at the Bonjakët site in the Late Classical period. Its foundation courses of sandstone were well preserved, but only scanty fragments of a limestone and marble superstructure remained. Soundings beneath the level of the foundations of the temple have provided a glimpse of ritual practice as early as the last quarter of the 7th century B.C. Worshippers dedicated many exotic objects at the temple, including some made of metal and glass; many of the artifacts find close parallels at the sanctuary of Poseidon at Isthmia and in the sanctuary of Hera at Perachora. In the Archaic period the sanctuary stood in isolation from the colony of Apollonia; surface survey suggests that the plain was relatively uninhabited at that time.

We cannot be certain about the deity or deities worshipped at this temple. Considering the location of the sanctuary, which likely defined the territory of Apollonia at its western extreme, it is possible to propose that Artemis was the divinity worshipped there.⁹ Indeed, a stele, which we found immured in the wall of a Roman building southeast of the sanctuary, bore a depiction of Artemis with a torch, and a dedicatory inscription named her.¹⁰ Still, the hundreds, if not thousands, of Hellenistic terracotta figurines depicting paired male and female reclining banqueters, many accompanied by a figure of Eros, may point to the worship of a divinity such as Aphrodite.¹¹ A Roman mosaic was uncovered nearby.

5. Davis et al. 2006; on the likely position of these lagoons, marshes, and the coastline of the Adriatic in antiquity, see Fouache 2002, p. 19, fig. 9; Fouache et al. 2004, p. 257, fig. 9; and Fouache 2007, pp. 3–13, fig. 7.

6. Davis et al. 2007, pp. 13–23.

7. Stocker 2009, p. 4, no. 12, and pp. 657–673.

8. This history of exploration is thoroughly documented in Chapter 1.

9. Davis et al. 2006. On sanctuaries in Albania similarly placed in liminal positions, see Davis et al. 2003, pp. 69–70 and n. 68; Quantin 1996.

10. See Chapter 3, this volume, for a discussion of the find context of the stele in trench 06T/07T/08T/09T. For the stele, see also Davis et al. 2006, fig. 4. We thank Peter van Minnen for offering us his opinion on the date of the inscription. Concerning other dedications to Artemis at Apollonia, see Robert 1950, pp. 70–73; see also Cabanes 1986, pp. 153–154. Cabanes, who published a relief from Apollonia dedicated to Artemis Limnatis, suggested that her sanctuary was located in the lower part of the city, perhaps even outside the walls “dans la zone des maris qui bordaient l’embouchure de l’Aos...,” and should be distinguished from a temple of Artemis Proscopa, which he identifies with the foundations found by Leon Rey on Hill 104 at Apollonia (1986, pp. 152–153; see also Quantin 2004, p. 596, who exhaustively surveys evidence for the cult of Artemis at Apollonia). Cabanes’s is an attractive suggestion, and it can be imagined that worship at the Bonjakët site was associated with Artemis Limnatis. The location of the sanctuary would be appropriate (see Cole 2004, pp. 178–197, on “landscapes of Artemis”). It is, however, far from clear that the relief found near the Bonjakët site depicts Artemis Limnatis. The presence of a torch is of little help since another representation from Apollonia with the same attribute is identified as Artemis Agrota. Moreover, firsthand examination of the stele suggested to François Quantin (pers. comm. May 30, 2005; see also Quantin 2007, p. 321) that the goddess represented was Artemis Soteira, rather than Artemis Limnatis. He writes: “J’ai fait un estampage de l’inscription, ce qui ne rend pas la lecture plus claire. Il me semble que nous avons deux lettres rondes au début de l’épîclèse, peut-être un sigma lunaire et un oméga, ce qui permettrait de proposer l’épîclèse Sôteira, ou Sôtèra, ce qui conviendrait parfaitement avec la torche.”

11. See discussion by Dimo et al. 2007, who, after Quantin 1996, also suggest a cult of Aphrodite on the basis of the figurines—without, however, excluding Artemis.

Clearly much work remains to be done. Only a fraction of the temple foundations has been cleared, and the Archaic deposits beneath them are still largely untouched. Remains earlier than the end of the 7th century B.C. may yet be found. Because the Bonjakët compound is an active farm, the progress of our excavation was slowed by the necessity of respecting the rhythms of the daily life of the residents, and we consequently had to backfill trenches at the end of each campaign. A visitor to Bonjakët thus sees nothing of our results—a pity since the site and its finds have potential value as a tourist attraction, especially if they can be presented within the overall program of the national park of Apollonia.

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INDEX

Page numbers in **bold** refer to illustrations, those in *italic* to tables.

- Acanthocardia*. *See* cockles
acropolis of Apollonia, **2**, 10, **10**, 477–479
agriculture, 20, 139–141
 agricultural economy, 138
alabaster pyxis lid, 70, 215, 403, **404**, 417, 469
alabastra, 409–413
Albania, **11**
 coastal development, 4–5, 26–29, **27**
 geological map, **25**
 tectonics, 23–26
alluvial deposits, 29, 30, 87, 88, 92, 95, 96, **99**, 100, 102–104
altars, 9, 15, 21, 70, **72**, 215, 416, **452**, 469, **472**
aluminum, 403, 429
amber, 179, 404, 423–424, 443
Amore, Maria Grazia, 478
amphorai, 150, 159, 163, 166, 174, 184, 188, 201–203, 223, 262–265
 transport, 152, 164, 168, 183, 217, 477
amphoriskoi. *See* unguentaria
anakalypsis, 289, 292, 295, 299, 306–310
Anamali, Skënder, 10, 12, 17, **19**, 285, 286, 469, 475
anathyrosis, 456, **456**, 460, **461**, 475
animal remains. *See* faunal remains
animal sacrifice. *See* sacrificial offerings
Aphrodite, 5, 119, 129, 285, 290, 308
Apollonia, 1, 17, 26, 28, 122, 243, 285, 477
 acropolis, **2**, 10, **10**, 477–479
 museum, 9, 21, 285, 468
 necropolis, 477
 Roman period, 294, 478
 settlement patterns, 477, 478
architrave block, 15, 57
Artemis, 5, 305, 308, 311, 448, 474
 stele, 5, **55**, 57, 447, 474, 475
Artemision (Ephesus), 129
aryballoi, 180, 182, 235, 411
askoi, 200, 221
Astarte, 307
astragali, 77, 79, 116, **116**, 119, 160, 443, 469
“Aucissa” brooch, 20
banded closed vessels, 155, 184, 201, 206, 222–223, 228, 251–252, 261–266
 amphorai. *See* amphorai
 chronology, 266–267
 hydriai. *See* hydriai
 typology, 262–266, **263**, **264**, **266**
barley, 131, **136**, 137, 139–141
Bassiakos, Yannis, 297
beads, 298, 413
Bejko, Lorenc, 9, 478
bivalves, 122, **122**, 123, 126, 128–130
boar, *110*, *112*, 112
bolsals, 226, 251
bone marrow, 116, 472
bones (animal), 92, 109–119, *110–115*, 150, 443
 astragali. *See* astragali
 femurs, 113, 115, 118, 472
 gnawing of, 109–112, *112*, *113*, 115, 118, 157
 mammal, 109, **116**
 mandibles, 113, 115, 117, 118, 472
 working of, 116
bones (human), 20
Bonjakët compound, 1, **3**, 6, 9, **13**, **34**, 453, 479
Bonjakët family, 15, 285, 453
 Hamdi, 1, 17, 33
 Islami, 33
 Nurredin, 15, 33, 453
 Pranvera, 15, 50, 453
 Sejdi, 1, 33
 Shuaip, 33, 453
Bonjakët houses, 1, 17, 33, **35**
Bonjakët site, 1, **2**. *See also* geomorphology
 archaeological history, 85

- Bonjakët site, *continued*
 depositional history, 84, 87
 Hellenistic / Roman, 475
 landscape context, 4–5, 29
 location, 23
 map, **12**
 ritual at. *See* ritual
 setting in antiquity, 30
 vandalism of, 57, 475
 vegetable garden, **14**, 15, 50, **52**
- botanical remains. *See* plant remains
 bowls, 152, 155, 193, 217, 218, 227, 251, 252, 413
 braziers, 169, 227, 248
 brick, 67–68, 146, 273, **274**, **275**, 420, 421. *See also* tile
 bronze, 20, 57, 79, 81, 186, 239, 403–406, **405**, 417, 423, 425
 butchery, 109, 111, 115, 118, 472
 Butrint region, **27**, 139
- Cassel cup, 150
 cattle, 109, *110*, *112*, *114*, 112–118, 472
 cauldrons, 81, 186, 239
 ceramics. *See* pottery
 ceramics workshop, 66, 69
Cerastoderma. *See* cockles
 cereals, 131, *132*, *135*, 137, 140, 141, 143
Cerithium. *See* gastropods (marine)
 charcoal, 37, 40, 48, 84, 92, 93, 131, 133, 136, *133–134*, 138, 139, 157
cheir'epi karmo, 297, 308, 310
Chlamys. *See* scallops
 chous, 218
 chytrai, 150, 157, 203, 217, 227, 248
 city-states. *See* poleis
 coastline, development of, 4–5, 26–29, **27**
 cockles, 121–130, **124**
 coins, 57, 61, 65, 75, 85, 159, 188, 194–195, 203–204, 206, 230, 406, 426, 460, 475
 cooking, 111, 116, 169, 474
 cooking ware, 143, 150, 153, 155, 157, 159, 175, 183, 203, 217, 223, 227, 252
 Corycean cave, 119
 cows. *See* cattle
 cult practice. *See* ritual
- deer (red), *110*, *112*, 112
 deforestation, 139
 Demeter, 10, 18, 20, 141, 285
 Dimo, Vangjel, 9
 dinos, 150, 227, 404
 dog, *110*, 111, *112*, 112
Donax. *See* bivalves
 Droop cup, 166
 drought, 140, 142
- earthquakes, 24, 31
 earthworms, 103
 echinoderms, 122, *122*
 echinus bowl, 193, 196, 228, 462
 eggs (pottery), 81, 239, 300, 309
 einkorn. *See* wheat
 Epidamnus, 292, 302, 308
 Epiros, 139, 140, 143
 Eros, 5, 285, 288–291, **291**, 294, 297, 299, 303, 305, 307–309
 exaleiptra, 153, 183, 185, 227
 excavation 1960 (Albano-Russian), **4**, 5, 10, 12, **19**, 20, 285, **286**
 brick and tile, 20
 graves, 20–21
 mosaic, **4**, 5, 12, 17 n. 17, 21–22, 85
 trench plan, **19**
 excavation strategy 2004–2006, 12, 15
- faunal remains, 472, 474
 anatomical composition, 113–116, *114*, *115*
 assemblage, 110–111, *110*, *111*
 demographic composition, 116–118, *117*
 formation processes, 111, *112*, *113*
 methodology, 109–110
 taxonomic composition, 112–113
- Ficus*. *See* fig
 Fier, 4, 23, 24, **27**, 479
 fig, 131, 137, **137**, 138
 figurines, 142, 253
 1960 excavation. *See* figurines (1960)
 2004–2006 excavation. *See* figurines (2004–6)
 Corinthian, 290
 description, 285
 gender, 285
 and weddings. *See* weddings

- figurines (1960), 18, 20, 285, 286, 386–400 (even-numbered pages), **387–401** (odd-numbered pages)
 double-reclining 287–290, **288**; type 1, 287–288; type 2, 288–289; type 3, 298–290
 protomai, 292–293, **292**
 referring, 291, **291**
- figurines (2004–6), 293–295, 301
 Archaic, 294–295, 301–302
 Classical, 294–296, 302–303
 heads, 294, 298, 299, 303
 Hellenistic, 294–296, 303
 iconography, 303–304
 kissing, 309
 plaques, 295
 protomai, 294–295, 302
 reclining, 17, **18**, 294, 303–304, 384
 standing / seated, 295, 298
 by trench:
 01T, 296–297, **313–359** (odd-numbered pages), 312–358 (even-numbered pages)
 03T, 297, 360, **361**, 362, **363**
 04T, 298, 364, **365**
 05T, 298, 364, **365**, 366, **367**
 07T, 09T, 10T, 298
 11T, 299, 366, **367**
 12T, 299, 368, **369**, 370, **371**
 13T, 299, 370, **371**
 14T, 299, 370, **371**
 15T, 299–300, 372, **373**, 374, **375**, 376, **377**, 378, **379**
 16T, 300–301, 378, **379**, 380, **381**, 382, **383**
 17T, 301, 382, **383**
- fillets, 18, 287, 289, 290, 292, 296, 303, 307, 309, 310
 flooding, 31, 84, 85, 100, 121, 130, 469, 474
 food. *See also* ritual dining
 consumption, 155, 157
 distribution, 138–139
 production, 138–139
- Fouache, Eric, 4, 30, 31
 Frakulla ridge, 28–30, 121
 fruits, 131, 135, 136, 140
 fuel, 139, 143, 474
- gastropods (marine), 122, 123, 126
 gastropods (terrestrial). *See* snails
- geomorphology, 23
 glass, 195, 239, 304, 408–416, **410**, **412**, **414**, 430–432
 goats, 110, 113, 116, 472
 Gondwana Land, 23
 Grose, David, 410
 guttae, 203, 227, 463–465, **464**
- hair (figurines), 292, 295, 297–299, 302, 307
 Daedalic style, 298
 Medusa-like, 292, 295, 302
- handstone, 416
 hares, 110, 112, 112
 head (marble), **49**, 50, 175
 heads (figurines), 294, 298, 299, 303
 Hera, 143, 235
 Hera Apia, 142, 143
 Heraion, 128–129
 highway (proposed), 4, 479
 himatia, 287
Hordeum. *See* barley
 horses, 110, 112, 112
 House of Orpheus, Cyprus, 291
 Hoxha, Enver, 12, 478
 hydriai, 20, 150, 184, 188, 193, 201, 202, 223, 241, 262–265, 305
- inscriptions, 445–448, **446**
 insects, 89, 90, 93, 95, 98, 100, 138
 Institute of Archaeology, Tirana, 1, 12, 479
 International Centre for Albanian Archaeology, 1, 4, 479
 iron, 406, **407**, 427–429
 metallurgy, 422–423
 Islami. *See* Bonjakët
 ivory, 193, 423, **423**, 443
- Kabirion, 119
 kalathoi, 77, 81, 179, 180, 209, 217, 233, 235, 239, 243, 251
 kantharoi, 155, 157, 159, 175, 195, 203, 226, 228, 251
 kilns, 15, 66, 85, 124, 205, 417, 475
 klinai, 285, 287, 289, 297, 302, 303, 308
 knucklebones. *See* astragali
 Komast cup, 150
 Kommos, 129

- Korabi zone, 26
 korai, 179, 182, 298
 Kore, 10, 18, 20, 141, 235, 285
 fertility cult 21
 Kosovo, 1, 26, 33, 85, 476
 kotylai, 180, 235, 237, 251
 krateriskos, 169
 kraters, 154, 169, 183, 184, 200, 201, 215, 223
 Kybele, 307
 kylikes, 150, 161, 180, 182, 190, 193, 198, 209,
 215, 241, 251
- labor organization, 138
 lagoons, 5, 26–30, **27**, 84, 85, 122–126
 lagynos, 187, 227
 lamps, 153, 163, 185, 209, 219, 223, 227, 229, 239,
 241
 land use, 138–140. *See also* agriculture
 local environment and, 160
 lead, 408, **408**, 429
 legumes, 132, 135, 136, 138, 139, 140, 142
Leguminosae. *See* legumes
 lekanai, 163
 lekythoi, 150, 182, 184, 190, 200, 201, 215, 217,
 218, 235, 241, 242
 libations, 81, 146, 161, 252, 307, 309. *See also* ritual
 limestone, 459–460, **460**
 altar, 469, **472**
 soils, 139
 loomweights, 184, 304, 417
 lopadia, 155, 157, 203, 227
 louteria, 166, 169, 245, 249
- Mallakstra hills, 23, 29, 267
 Mallakstra Regional Archaeological Project. *See*
 MRAP
 maps and plans, **10–13**, **19**, **25**, **27**, **34**, **452**
 marble, 5, 21, 90, 93, **95**, 182, 221, 298, 416, 445,
 454, 459, 465, **467**, 468
 head, **49**, 50, 175
 revetment, 194, **472**, 475
 Margelliç, 477
 marriage, 143, 285, 297, 304–311, 474. *See also*
 weddings
 McClellan, Murray, 409, 410
 meat consumption, 115, 116, 169, 472. *See also*
 food; ritual dining
- metals, 104, 116, 230, 403–408, 425–427, 429, 469.
 See also individual metals
 coins. *See* coins
 precious, 403
 vessels, 469
 Metaponto, 290, 292, 296, 303, 307, 309, 310
 micromorphology,
 analytical methods, 88
 archaeological significance, 103–104
 features, 88–90, 89
 interpretation, 90
 trench 03T, 90–92, **91**
 trench 15T, 92–95, **94**, **95**
 trench 16T, 95–96
 trench 17T, 96–98, **97**, **99**, **101**
 site-wide synthesis, 99–103
 midden, 92, 98, 141, 142
 millstones, 416
 Mithra, head of, 21
 molluscs, 474. *See also individual species*
 ancient to modern, 128, 129
 Archaic, 125, 126
 assemblage, 121–123, **122**, 122
 burrowing behavior, 122, 125, 130
 Classical-Hellenistic, 128, 127, 128
 distribution, 124–125, 125
 lagoon species, 122–123
 late Archaic-Classical, 126–127, 127
 in ritual, 128–130
 role at Bonjakët, 130
 montmorillonite, 88, 101
 mortaria, 239, 248, 249
 mortars, 183, 209, 229, 239
 mosaic, **4**, 5, 12, 17 n. 17, 21–22, 85
 associated sculptures, 21
 MRAP, 1, 9, 301, 309, 477, 479
 Muka, Belisa, 303
 museum of Apollonia, 9, 21, 285, 468
 mussels, 122, 123, 123, 125, 126, 127, 129, 130
Mytilus. *See* mussels
 Myzeqe coastal plain, 23, 24, 26–31
- nails, 193, 206, 228, 405, 406
 Naliokina, M A, 22
 National Centre of Scientific Research, 297, 420,
 424
 necropolis of Apollonia, 477

- Neotethys Ocean, 24
- oak, 131, 136–139, 142
- oinochoai, 18, 150, 169, 171, 178, 179, 218, 220, 226, 227, 237, 289, 297, 308, 411–413
- Olea*. *See* olive
- olive, 131, 133–136, 136–143, 474
- olpe, 235, 241
- ophiolites, 24, **25**, 26
- “Palace of Nestor” (Pylos), 118
- pear / apple / hawthorn, 132–143, 133–136
- perirrhacteria. *See* louteria
- pestoi, 417
- “Pheidias” mugs, 150, 201
- phialai, 18, 81, 178, 239, 243, 245, 252, 287–291, **291**, 297, 305, 307, 469
- pigments, 81, 239, 289, 290, 292, 293, 295, 296, 298–300, **423**, 424, 443, 444, 465
- pigs, 110, 111, 112, 112, 118
- pine, 132, 133–136, 136–139, 142
- pins, 79, 81, 404–406, 413, 423, 469
- Pinus*. *See* pine
- pitcher, 203
- pithoi, 167, 249
- plane (tree), 132, 133, 134, 136, 138, 142
- plant remains, 474. *See also individual species*
- Archaic, 136–137
 - Bonjakët sanctuary (comparison), 135–136
 - Classical-Hellenistic, 138
 - Late Archaic-Early Classical, 137
 - materials recovered, 132, 132
 - recovery methods, 132, 134, 135
 - ritual, use in, 131, 135, 137, 140
- plaques, 153, 290, 296, 297, 310, 445
- Platanus*. *See* plane (tree)
- plates, 153, 155, 157, 160, 161, 163, 217, 227, 249, 251, 252
- Pliny the Elder, 424
- pod grass, 139
- Pojan, 1, 9, **12**, 33, 43
- poleis, 138, 304, 310, 311, 477
- pollen, 104, 138, 139, 142
- poloi, 287–291, 296, 298, 302, 303, 305, 307, 310
- pomegranates (pottery), 77, 200, 235, 299, 300, 309
- population, 301, 476
- postmedieval ceramics, 269–271, **271**
- pottery. *See also individual forms*
- chronology, 250
 - concordance, 279–284
 - deposit dates by trench, 481–484
 - excavation methodology, 145–146
 - Ottoman, 184, 209
 - in ritual, 145, 146, 161, 166, 251–252
 - Roman, 160, 184, 187, 204, 217
 - and temple destruction, 252
 - and votive activity, 146, 161, 251
- pottery by trench,
- 01T, 146–161, **147**, 148–149
 - deposit E, 150–153, **151**, **152**
 - deposit D, 153–154, **154**
 - deposit C, 155–156, **156**
 - deposit B, 157–159, **158**, **159**
 - deposit A, 159–161, **161**
 - 02T, **162**, 162, 163–164
 - deposit C, 163
 - deposit B, 163, **163**
 - deposit A, 163, **163**
 - 03T, 164–175, 165–166, **167**
 - deposit E, 164
 - deposit D, 164–169, **168**
 - deposit C, 169–171, **170**, **171**
 - deposit B, 171–174, **172**, **173**
 - deposit A, 174–175, **175**
 - 04T, 175, **176**
 - 05T/10T, 176–186, 177–178, **179**
 - deposit F, 178–180, **180**
 - deposit E, 180, **181**, **182**
 - deposit D, 183, **183**
 - deposit C, 182, **182**
 - deposit B, 183–184, **184**
 - deposit A, 184–186, **185**, **186**
 - 06T, 07T, 08T, 09T, 186–188, **187**, **188**
 - 11T, 188–196, 189–190, **191**
 - deposit F, 190–193, **192**
 - deposit E, **192**, 193
 - deposit D, 193
 - deposit C, 193–194, **194**
 - deposit B, 194–195, **194**
 - deposit A, 195–196, **195**
 - 12T, 196–205, 197, **198**
 - deposit F/G, 204, **204**
 - deposit E, 196–200, **199**
 - deposit D/C, 200, **200**

- pottery by trench: 12T, *continued*
 deposit B, 201, **201**
 deposit A, 201–203, **202**
 13T, 205–206, **205**
 deposit B, 205
 deposit A, 206, **206**
 14T, 206–209, **207**, **207**, **208**
 15T 209–230, **214**
 deposit N, 209, *210–213*, **215**
 deposit M, 215–217, **216**
 deposit L, 217, **217**
 deposit K, 218, **218**
 deposit J, 218–219, **219**
 deposit I, 219, **219**
 deposit H, 219–220, **219**
 deposit G, 220–221, **220**
 deposit F, 221, **221**
 deposit E, 222, **222**
 deposit D, 223, **223**
 deposit C, 223–228, **224–226**
 deposit B, 228–230, **229**
 deposit A, 230
 16T, 230–245, *231–232*, **233**
 deposit I, 232–235, **234**, **242**
 deposit H, **234**, 235–236, **236**, **242**
 deposit G, 236–237, **237**, **242**
 deposit F, 237–243, **238**, **240**, **241**, **242**
 deposit E, 244, **244**
 deposits B/C/D, 244
 deposit A, 244–245, **245**
 17T, 245–250, *246*, **247**
 deposit C, 245–429, **248**
 deposit B, 249, **249**
 deposit A, 250, **250**
- protomai, 18, 153, 155, 156, 292, **292**, 294, 296–302, 308–309
- Pyrus / Malus / Crataegus*. *See* pear / apple / hawthorn
- pyxides, 153, 155, 185, 195, 215, 217, 235, 239, 243
 lids, 70, 215, 403, **404**, 417, 469, 470
- Quercus*. *See* oak
- radiocarbon dating, 15, 30, 34, 40, 48, 104
- Rheneia cups, 169, 171
- Risser, Martha, 255
- ritual, 85, 115, 139–140, 155, 174, 251–252, 295, 302, 310–311, 469–474
 cleaning, 296
 dedications, 164, 175
 dining, 124, 140, 141, 146, 150, 176, 252, 253
 drinking, 146, 161, 166, 169, 243, 252, 253
 libations, 81, 146, 161, 252, 307, 309
 local variation, 310
 plant use in, 131, 137, 140,
 pottery in, 145, 146, 161, 166, 251–252
 wood use in, 142–143
- rivers, 27, 29, 84, 90, 100, 121. *See also individual rivers*
- Roman remains, 5, 15, 203, 406, 414. *See also kilns; mosaic*
- Roskovec wetland, 139, 142
- Sabetai, Vicky, 308
- sacrificial offerings, 98, 130
 sex of, 118, 304, 474
- salinity, 9, 122, 124
- Sanctuary of Apollo and Artemis, 140
- Sanctuary of Artemis, 292
- Sanctuary of Demeter, 129
- Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore, 129, 140–142
- Sanctuary of Hera, 5, 129
- Sanctuary of Hermes and Aphrodite, 129
- Sanctuary of Poseidon, 5, 128, 140
- sands, 30
- scallops, 121, 130
- Scheuchzeria*. *See* pod grass
- sediments, 26–31. *See also* micromorphology
- seeds, 131, 137
- Seman river, 23, **27**, **28**, 29, 121
- sheep, 112–118, *110*, *112*, *115*, 472
- shells. *See molluscs*
- signet ring (bronze), 20
- skeletal remains. *See* bones
- skyphoi, 77, 81, 150, 152–252 *passim*, 255–260, 469
 Archaic, 255–256, **256**
 chronology, 255
 Classical, 257–259, **259**
 Classical-Hellenistic, 260, **260**
 Heron Class, 164, 199
 Late Archaic, 257, **258**, **259**
- slags, 421–423, **422**, *441–442*

- snails, 121–126, *123*, 129, 130
 socioeconomic interaction, 138
 spindle whorl, 81, 417
 stelai, 5, **55**, 57, 291, 445, 447, 474, 475
 stephanai, 287, 305, 307
 Stocker, Sharon R, 477, 478
 stone, 416–417, *433–437*
 stopper, 417
 stratigraphy, 33, **36**
 trench 01T, 37–41, **38–39**, *40*, *41*
 trench 02T, 41–43, **42**, *42*, **43**
 trench 03T, 43–48, **44–47**, *48*, 50
 trench 04T, 49–50, **49**
 trench 05T, 50–53, **51**, **52**, *53*
 trench 06T, 53, **55–56**, *57*, 59
 trench 07T, 53, **54**, **55**, *57*, 59
 trench 08T, 53, **55–56**, *57*, 59
 trench 09T, 53, **55**, *57*, 59
 trench 10T, 50–53, **52**
 trench 11T, 59–61, **58**, **59**, *60*
 trench 12T, 61–65, **62–64**, *65*
 trench 13T, 66–69, **66**, **67**, *68*
 trench 14T, **69**, *70*
 trench 15T, 70–76, **71–74**, *75*
 trench 16T, 76–81, **77**, **78**, *79*
 trench 17T, **80**, 81–84, 82, **83**, *83*
 surface survey, 5, 9, 452
 sympotic-style drinking, 154, 161
 syncretism, 140, 141
 tectonics, 23–29
 coastal development, 26–29
 palaeotectonic models, 23, 24
 teeth (animal), 84, 109–111, 113, 115, 116, 118
 temple at Bonjakët, 1, 5, 33, 139
 abandonment / destruction of, 253, 459, 478
 building blocks, 416
 cessation of cult, 478
 construction history, 188, 190, 196
 constructions predating, 468–469
 dedication, 5, 141, 253, 285, 304, 309, 311, 474
 dimensions, 453
 Doric columns 460–462, **462**, **463**
 euthynteria, 454
 foundations, 5, **14**, 15, 176, 452–459, **452–458**, **471**
 guttæ, 463–464, **464**
 limestone, 459–460, **460**, **461**
 marble, 467, **467**, 468
 marble revetement, **472**, 475
 plan, 452, **452**, 453
 pry hole, 454, **455**
 sima fragment, 465, **465**
 superstructure, 5, 453, 454, 459
 T-clamp, 473, 474
 terracotta, architectural, 465–468, **466**
 walls, 12, 17, 20, **56**
 water channel, 17, 18, 473, 475
 Temple of Poseidon, 5, 128, 140
 terracing, 139, 140
 terracotta small finds, 417–420, **418**, **419**, *438–440*.
 See also figurines
 tesserae, 21–22, 217, 261, 417
 thymiateria, 153, 200, 204, 239
 tile, 146, 243, 273–274, **276**, **278**, 276–278, 420–421, 470, 471
 trenches, 15, **19**, 33, **34**, **36**, 124
Triticum. *See* wheat
 unguentaria, 188, 195, 203, 227, 247, 250, 415
 University of Arizona, 88
 University of Cincinnati, 1, 479
 University of Tirana, 479
 vegetation. *See* plant remains
 veils, 287, 289, 290, 292, 295, 298–300, 305–310.
 See also anakalypsis, poloi, stephanai
 vitrified ceramics. *See under* slags
 Vjosa river, 9, 23, 29, 30, 50, 66, 84, 85, 87, 121, 122, 140
 votive deposits, 137–140, 143, 146, 152, 174–175, 178, 469
 votive dump, 110, 111, 115, 118, 139, 142, 150, 252
 wedding imagery (Bonjakët), 306–310
 weddings, 285, 297, 304–310, 474
 weights, 417
 wheat, 131, *132*, *135*, 137–141
 wood, 15, 37, 40, 43, 44, 45, 48, 70, **72**, 131–139, *133*, *136*. *See also* fuel
 ritual use of, 142–143
 wool-working, 235
 Zog I, King of Albania (Ahmet Zogu), 1, 33, 476

