

Benakeion Archaeological Museum of Kalamata



The Benakeion Archaeological Museum is situated at the heart of the historical centre of Kalamata. This remarkable Venetian-style mansion, at the corner of Benaki and Papazoglou streets, accommodates a rich collection of archaeological treasures from various sites in Messenia, which span the time from the Bronze Age to the Roman period. The museum owes its name to Antonios Benakis, founder of the Benaki Museum in Athens. Following his wish, the building was donated to the Greek Archaeological Service by his heirs in 1962. Built in 1742, during the Turkish occupation, it was

closely associated with important historical events of that period. In 1971 it was opened as a museum. The old exhibition included finds from small-scale excavations undertaken by the 7th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, but its nucleus was formed by artefacts from the major excavations at Malthi and Nichoria. The mezzanine floor housed Byzantine antiquities and other historical relics from Kalamata.

On 14 September 1986, a destructive earthquake struck Kalamata. The museum and most of its exhibits were seriously damaged. The archaeologists, conservators and workmen of the 7th Ephorate mounted a titanic effort to pack and transport the exhibits to the Olympia Museum for safekeeping and conservation.

The restoration of the building lasted five years (1988-1992) and was coupled with a redisplay project, which resulted in the inauguration of the exhibition on the ground floor in 1995. Three years later the

second floor was completed. The new display, inaugurated in 2000, aims at allowing visitors to approach the artefacts through comprehensive thematic units, while conveying information about their use and significance. By using ample visual material (maps, photographs, models, reconstructions) visitors gain a better understanding of various aspects of the civilization that flourished in Messenia for centuries.

Ground Floor

The ground floor exhibition occupies four rooms with finds from various sites in Messenia, dating from Classical to Roman times.



The first room is dedicated to sculptures mainly from Petalidi (ancient Koroni). Among them, the inscribed Herm stele with inserted head of a youth from ancient Messene is of prime importance. The following room is devoted to burial customs. Inscribed grave stelae, relief plaques representing funerary feasts (nekrodeipna), and part of a sarcophagus are on display.



The third room houses architectural members and inscriptions from various sites in Messenia. A decree stele from ancient Thouria is of particular interest. The fourth room contains a fine mosaic from Koroni, and fragments of another Roman mosaic from Dessila.



Second Floor



The first room (showcases 1-4) is largely devoted to the rich mycenaean tholos tomb at Nichoria, which contained pottery, bronze objects, seals and jewellery made of gold and semi-precious stones.



The second room houses representative finds from the settlement at Nichoria (showcase 7), whose inhabitation spans the time from the Middle Helladic period until the Byzantine era. The American School of Classical Studies in Athens, under Professor W.A. McDonald, embarked on a pioneering project (1969-1973) which involved scientists from all related fields



in order to provide a comprehensive overview of all aspects of daily life in this ancient community. In the same room, the most important grave offerings from the cemeteries at Nichoria-Karpophora are on view, dating from early Mycenaean to Early Geometric and Classical times (showcases 9-10).



The third room accommodates objects from the acropolis of Malthi, which flourished during the Middle Helladic and Mycenaean periods. Pottery (showcase 11), tools and ornaments made of stone and bone (showcases 12, 14) give valuable



information about the everyday life of Malthi's prehistoric dwellers. Prominently displayed is the Neolithic-type figurine of a seated female figure (showcase 13), one of the most important finds of the excavation, which was conducted by the Swedish archaeologist M.N. Valmin between 1926-1936. The same room is also dedicated to the Early Helladic "megaron" unearthed at Akovitika, with sherds and a clay sealing typical of that period on view (showcase 15).



The fourth room contains finds from recent excavations carried out by the 7th Ephorate of Antiquities at various sites in Messenia (showcase 16), mainly from the mycenaean necropolis at Antheia-Hellenika (showcases 17-18), which yielded remarkable gold jewellery. Also on



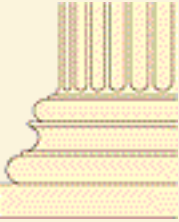
display are objects from the Archaic house at Kopanaki (showcase 19) and the temple of the river god Pamisos discovered at Agios Floros (showcase 21). Finally, the exhibition includes chance finds handed over to the Greek Archaeological Service (showcase 20).

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