

Microcosm to landscape: the church called Theoskepasti and the environs of Apalirou

Vicky MANOLOPOULOU

Stelios LEKAKIS

Mark JACKSON

Sam TURNER

Abstract

Το κεφάλαιο αυτό χρησιμοποιεί την ιστορία της Θεοσκέπαστης, μιας μικρής εκκλησίας στο κάστρο του Απαλίου στη Νάξο, ως όχημα για μια εισαγωγή στις μεθοδολογικές και θεωρητικές προσεγγίσεις όπου στηρίζεται το ερευνητικό πρόγραμμα *Apalirou Environs Project*. Η Θεοσκέπαστη και το ευρύτερο τοπίο προσεγγίζονται στη *longue durée* («μακρά διάρκεια»). Προφορικές μαρτυρίες ντόπιων κατοίκων χρησιμοποιούνται για να ερευνηθεί το πως εκλαμβάνονται σήμερα η εκκλησία και το τοπίο στο οποίο αυτή βρίσκεται. Στη συζήτηση συμπεριλαμβάνονται γκραφίτι και άλλα υλικά κατάλοιπα σε μία προσπάθεια να καθοριστεί το πως οι άνθρωποι συσχετίζονταν με το κτίριο στο πρόσφατο παρελθόν. Μέσω της ανάλυσης των δεδομένων αυτών, θα δειχθεί το πως η Θεοσκέπαστη είχε και ακόμα έχει αξία για την τοπική κοινωνία. Αν και φαινομενικά ερειπωμένη, η εκκλησία επισκέπτονταν τουλάχιστον από τις αρχές του 20ου αιώνα και ακόμα και σήμερα βρίσκεται σε χρήση για θρησκευτικούς σκοπούς. Ο συνδυασμός τρισδιάστατης έρευνας (*three dimensional survey*) και προσεκτικής εξέτασης έφεραν στο φως καινούργια στοιχεία τα οποία υποδεικνύουν ότι το κτίριο και το περιβάλλον τοπίο είναι παλαιότερα από ότι αρχικά εθεωρείτο. Η εκκλησία έχει διάφορες φάσεις, συμπεριλαμβανομένης μιας μεταβυζαντινής η οποία πιθανώς να συμπίπτει με τα τέλη του 18ου και αρχές του 19ου αιώνα – όπως υποδηλώνεται από οικοδομήματα που βρίσκονται στα νότια της εκκλησίας. Σε αυτή τη φάση ανήκει και η ανοικοδόμηση του νότιου τοίχου και του δυτικού μέρους του βόρειου τοίχου της εκκλησίας. Σε μία πιο πρώιμη φάση ανήκουν τα δύο τυφλά αψιδώματα και οι πεσσοί του βόρειου και νότιου τοίχου που κατασκευάστηκαν έτσι ώστε να στηρίζουν δομικά τη λιθόκτιστη καμάρα της στέγης, η οποία ανήκει σε μία ακόμη πιο πρώιμη φάση. Λαμβάνοντας υπόψη δεδομένα από το ευρύτερο τοπίο και τοπικά συγκρίσιμα παραδείγματα, προτείνεται ότι οι πρώιμες φάσεις του κτηρίου ανήκουν στη βυζαντινή εποχή. Η Θεοσκέπαστη επομένως είναι μέρος ενός τοπίου το οποίο έχει μία πιο μακροχρόνια ιστορία διαμόρφωσης από ότι προηγουμένως πιστευόταν.

Η κύρια θέση αυτού του κεφαλαίου είναι ότι τα τοπία περιλαμβάνουν υλικά και άυλα στοιχεία και αποτελούν και αυτά πολιτιστική κληρονομιά. Επίσης ότι η αξία τους διαπραγματεύεται και αναθεωρείται από τις κοινωνίες οι οποίες δρουν σε αυτά.

Introduction

In his book *Dreaming and Historical Consciousness in Island Greece*, Charles Stewart explores how the Naxians' perception of the past has shaped the way they act in daily life in recent centuries.¹ By dream-

1. Stewart (2012).

ing of and ‘discovering’ holy relics in a mountain village they created a heritage of ‘tangible’ (physical) objects associated with ‘intangible’ stories and values. Like all types of heritage, this one was linked to emotional and social conflicts which helped to shape the story of the community and the ways it has unfolded over the course of recent history. The story Stewart presents illustrates the fundamental point that cultural heritage is not inherent in place or objects or part of their essential fabric, but that it is attributed and its character emerges as a result of social processes. Heritage can be valued in different ways at different times, a point that can be observed at a range of political and social scales, from the intimate setting of a small island to the level of large states: the relatively modest centenary commemorations in contemporary Russia for the 1917 Revolution provide a striking example of a major historical event which might have been celebrated much more vigorously under different political circumstances.² The significance and quality of cultural heritage is negotiated as social and political contexts change. The value of heritage can be maintained or altered consciously or unconsciously, but emerges constantly through processes that develop over time in relation to past practices, perceptions, values and objects. Consequently the values of tangible and intangible heritage are inextricably entangled with each other and with what happened in the past. Knowledge of the past (whether discovered, inherited, dreamt, imagined, invented, learned or taught) also contributes to shaping the processes of change.

In the early- to mid-20th century, heritage discourse tended to locate (or ‘authorise’) value in specific objects, structures and locales. Typically these were easily-identifiable ‘monuments’ of elite culture like temples, castles and cathedrals. In the later 20th and 21st century, evolving post-colonial perspectives forced researchers to reflect that this is a recent (19th and 20th century) and politically-charged vision of heritage.³ By contrast, they recognise today that cultural heritage is not limited to specific containers that can be delimited and confined. Cultural heritage is created by all individuals and communities and consequently it is ubiquitous and continuous, occurring whenever and wherever it is perceived.⁴

The concept of ‘landscape’ is intimately related to this understanding of cultural heritage, and can itself be understood as a type of heritage.⁵ Like heritage, landscape emerges through the unfolding processes of perceptual and physical shaping. For landscapes, these processes include not only the actions, thoughts and emotions of human beings but also the interactions between people and the natural world, including animals and plants, weather and water, earth and stone.⁶ All these things are perceived by people and given values which in turn affect how they come to be shaped and re-imagined in the future.

Just as a monument like a church building can have multiple phases and a long history, so does the landscape around it; and just as a church is not simply a relic from the past but also part of the ongoing experience of people today, so the landscape in which that building is located continues to change with people in the present. Both landscape and heritage have tangible and intangible aspects; both are dynamic, changing in relation to what has happened in the past and the ways they are understood in the present. These perspectives inform the work of the Apalirou Environs Project (AEP), whose study area comprises part of south-western Naxos. Through work with local people, archive research and fieldwork, the project is seeking to understand the changing story of the landscape around the fortified kastro on the mountain-top above.

In this chapter we introduce some of the AEP’s recent work by reporting on the small church called Theoskepasti, which lies on the western slope of Apalirou below the northern part of the kastro (**fig 1**). Archaeological research on historic buildings (particularly churches) sometimes focusses on

2. Dejevsky (2017).

3. Smith (2006).

4. Holtorf and Fairclough (2013).

5. Harvey (2015).

6. Harrison (2015)

reconstructing particular phases of development at the expense of the longer story, and in doing so can isolate buildings from their contexts. Our aim is to introduce the story of Theoskepasti as a way into the story of the wider landscape. We show that the Theoskepasti church and the mountainside where it nestles are places of significance for contemporary communities and that they have long and (by scholars) previously unsuspected histories which stretch back to the Byzantine era. By investigating the unfolding story of the Theoskepasti church we hope to understand something more of its place in the heritage of a wider landscape.

The Theoskepasti church

The mountainous slopes to the west of the kastro are steep, with extensive scatters of stone scree and thick bushy vegetation punctuated in places with isolated rocky outcrops. The hillsides are exploited by shepherds and their herds, mainly goats, and are rarely visited by the tourists who occasionally venture up on their way to the kastro above. Below the hillslopes around the foot of the mountain there are isolated farmsteads and flatter open fields in the plain, often delimited by drystone walls topped with wire fences.

The church is built into the slope of the hillside so that its east end is buried up against a rocky cliff. The siting of the church perhaps helps to explain its name: Theoskepasti literally means ‘covered by God’. The epithet, which is found all over Greece today, is used to compliment the building and does not refer to any specific dedication. Textual references to the epithet Theoskepasti go back at least as far as the 10th century: for example, it is used in the *De Ceremoniis*⁷ and found in the 15th-century *History* of Michael Panaretos in reference to the burial of Manuel III of Trebizond, who died in 1412 and was buried at the monastery of Theoskepasti.⁸ Other examples on Naxos include the 10th-century church of Agios Mamas or Panagia Theoskepasti at Potamia and Panagia Theoskepasti at Chora.⁹ It has been argued that the epithet may refer to churches carved in the rock and thought not to have been made by human hands; it often seems to relate to a miraculous account of the church being ‘covered’ during a time of need, either for protection or to provide materials for the roof.¹⁰ The archaeology of the building, outlined below, suggests that the existing stone roof dates from Byzantine times: perhaps its precarious survival was considered a miracle. The Theoskepasti church is today the only structure on Apalirou with a roof, other than cisterns in the kastro above.

The written sources from Byzantine and medieval Naxos are relatively few;¹¹ they seem more or less silent on the subject of the kastro and its surroundings. The first written testimonies go back to the 17th century and mainly concern accounts of the battle to occupy the castle led by Marco Sanudo, the creator and first Duke of the Duchy of the Archipelago, in the name of the Serene Republic of Venice in 1207.¹² Later sources mention the ruinous Apalirou and the settlements on its southern and western sides as Kato Choria, ‘where the capital of the island used to be.’¹³ However, the sources do not specify the names or exact locations of either settlements or their resources such as pastures.¹⁴ Several toponyms survive from this era which mark productive pastures¹⁵ and are still used today for fields, hills,

7. Vogt (1939), p. 7; Moffatt and Tall (2012, I), p. 198.

8. Lampsides (1958), p. 81.

9. Dimitropoulos (1983), pp. 523-27.

10. Dubisch (1995), p. 64; Dimitropoulos (1983), pp. 523-27.

11. Tomodakes (1983), p. 6.

12. Saulger (1698) p. 7; Karalis (1878), p. 6; Fotheringham (1915), pp. 43-44.

13. Zerlenti (1887), p. 408.

14. Zerlenti (1902), p. 496-97.

15. Listed by Coronelli (1690), p. 233.

slopes and wider areas around the mountain. They also feature in the numerous local folktales about Apalirou, a number of which were recorded by the late journalist Nikos Kefalliniadis.¹⁶ Most of them discuss either a surprise attack by pirates and the death of the princess of the castle (*vassilopoúla*), or a tribe of amazon-like women (*kastrianés*) who built the fortress and defended it by throwing stones from the battlements. It is possible that these stories reflect folktales of seaborne attacks on Naxos during the early Middle Ages.

In modern times the Theoskepasti church provided a landmark in the area together with the roofed cistern on the top of Apalirou (*fountána*). Local interviewees commonly refer to these buildings when describing features of the local landscape. Theoskepasti lies in a north-western niche of the commons of Apalirou, marked by a strong drystone wall on its western side. Mr Manolis, who lived in the area as a boy, recalls that:

Below the drystone wall the land belongs to individuals... We used to pay a small fee to Damarionas borough (*koinótita*) up to the 1980s, equal to around 30 euros, to have access in the common pasture. There were less than ten owners in the area around the kastro, from the villages of Damarionas and Filoti. Each had 30 to 50 animals (sheep and goats).¹⁷

Mr Manolis conjures up a vibrant picture of the site only 70 years ago, with farmers from Damarionas at the western foot of the kastro and farmers from Filoti on the eastern side tending to small cultivated areas and a few animals. This local ecosystem shrank in the 1970s when people – including Manolis himself – migrated to Athens or changed occupations following the explosion of mass summer tourism in the Aegean islands.¹⁸ ‘I don’t remember any masses in Theoskepasti’, he continues, ‘it was always abandoned’. Later, in a hushed voice, he confides: ‘You know they [looters] dug there and 100 meters below this one, where there is another church. They found nothing, only the foundation slabs, there is nothing there.’

This recollection refers to the 1950s and 1960s, when looting activities were widespread on the island.¹⁹ Locals were mainly searching for Cycladic graves and marble offerings, figurines and other artefacts (ca. 3200-2000 BC) that were highly valued in the art markets of the West.²⁰ Byzantine antiquities were not their priority but Byzantine churches on the Aegean islands were commonly linked to tales of golden treasures which were thought to be concealed within the walls or under the altar.²¹

Another farmer from Damarionas, Mr Christos, is now 90 years old. He gives further details on one of these operations near Theoskepasti, conflating it with the pirates’ folktale:

We opened a grave with nine heads in. Their graves are similar to ours. The pirates came and conquered the castle and this is probably what they left [meaning the dead bodies]. The cemetery is off the entrance of Theoskepasti, you will see the open graves when you get close to it. The looters told us that there was gold there. We went at night, we opened about ten of them but we didn’t find anything, only the heads.

Even though the presence of a cemetery in the area cannot be confirmed archaeologically at the moment, Mr Christos’ memory provides valuable information on the looting practices of the era, and the aspirations, processes and findings of the looters, enmeshed in a thick substratum of perceptions

16. Kefalliniadis (1964), pp. 171-87.

17. The names of the interviewees used in this chapter are pseudonyms. The interviews were carried out by Stelios Lekakis in 2015 and 2016.

18. Lekakis (2013), pp. 80-83.

19. Doulas (2007).

20. Gill and Chippindale (1993).

21. Politis (2012).

and uses of the past and its tangible remains.²² The looting activities of this period destroyed numerous Cycladic graves on the islands,²³ and looters are blamed for the demolition of some churches on Naxos including Agios Ioannis at Mersinos, a couple of kilometres away from Theoskepasti.

Even so, considered in the *longue durée* the stories of looters are just one specific event in the landscape history of a place like Theoskepasti. In the recent past, chapels in rural Naxos and the Aegean islands in general provided important points of reference in the collective life of the surrounding communities. Most of them only saw religious celebrations once per year, but these were significant at the local level, marking the beginnings and ends of agrarian activities and forming a holy 'cloud' of points that served to tame the 'wilderness': the areas beyond the settlements.²⁴

Rural chapels were looked after by their 'neighbours', a practice which continues today. Locals who own adjacent fields are silently expected to clean and whitewash the building, and clear the path leading to it; they must generally prepare for the annual celebration when the chapel will be visited by people from the village to which it belongs and from other villages. The 'neighbour' families might be assisted by other pious villagers or people that have a '*táma/táximo*' to the saint;²⁵ if they are unable to perform the necessary tasks, their relatives or specifically assigned people may help. This obligation (called the '*obbligó*' on the Aegean island of Tenos) is passed down from one generation of each responsible family to the next.²⁶

Theoskepasti is currently tended to by Mr Yiannis, a young local builder; his family property borders the church. He visits the building once in a while to clean and burn incense. When we first visited the church a niche in the south arcade covered with a piece of glass contained an icon, oil, candles, and other equipment for devotional and/or liturgical purposes stored in a number of small metal and plastic containers; a plastic bottle had been reused as a vase for (once) fresh flowers and a can of instant coffee as a box for storing incense. There was charcoal but also a lighter, votive light wicks and wick floaters, all for use with an oil lamp (**fig. 2**). On the north wall was a modern portable icon of Christ. A modern censer, clearly used recently, with charcoal and burned incense had been placed in front of the apse on a simple altar built of loose rubble. In July 2015, when we began our fieldwork, the censer was still in the same place as it had been when we visited in 2014 (**fig. 3**).

Despite the signs of recent activity, it seems that Mr Manolis was right about the lack of masses in the church. The local priest told us that neither he nor the priest before him had ever delivered mass or any other liturgy there, which means that Theoskepasti has been (officially) inactive since at least the 1930s-40s. It is today in a relatively poor state of repair and thanks to the severity of the climb and the roughness of the path is not easily accessible. The priest last visited the church two years ago to check its state of conservation, as he does for all the chapels in his parish.

The modern and post-medieval chapel

Entering the church today the visitor's attention is first caught by the devotional paraphernalia perched on and around the rough, drystone altar which has been assembled in front of the apse, and the portable icons in the northern and southern niches. Having adjusted to the relative darkness inside, the eye begins to make out numerous graffiti written on the render of the church's apse and the east wall. The dates which are given suggest that most graffiti were added here between ca. 1910 and 1930, though

22. Lekakis in prep.

23. Gill and Chippindale (1993), p. 609.

24. Du Boulay (2009), pp. 157-58; Lekakis in prep.

25. A votive offering or a service, in our case provided by a person or a family for the fulfilment of a vow.

26. see Lekakis, this volume

some may be a little earlier or later. The best-preserved examples are on the north side of the east wall and give us some idea of the people who were visiting the place in the early 20th century (**fig. 4**).

The first example was written by a man named Christos Detsis who recorded his visit to the church on 14 August 1929, the day of the vigil of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary:

*Χρήστος [Δ]
Γ
Δετση
1929. 8-14*

According to electoral catalogues and registers of male births it seems that men with the last name Detsis or Dretsisis lived in the nearby villages of Damarionas, Damalas and Apeiranthos. There is only one record of a Christos Detsis whose father's name began with the letter giota, as recorded in the graffiti. He was Christos Detsis, son of Ioannis, born in the village of Damalas in 1894.²⁷ Interestingly the 1891 electoral catalogues for Damalas list only one person with the name Ioannis Detsis: a 25-year-old farmer and son of Micheletos Detsis. If we assume that the birth records are accurate, Ioannis Detsis voted in the local elections of July 1891 and then three years later, at the age of 28 had a son, Christos. It was this Christos who inscribed his first and last names in the summer of 1929, at the age of 35. It is interesting to note that today land to the south east of Apalirou belongs to families with the last name Detsis.

Other graffiti on the same wall record two individuals who only provided the initials of their first and last names and their father:

*Θ.Ι.Τ.
Ι.Ι.Τ. τή ημαίρα του ΤΑΞ(Η)ΑΡΧΗ*

It seems likely that these two people share the same father and that they visited the church on the day of the Archangel.²⁸ The script provides some indication of the level of literacy and perhaps of the personal sentiments of the writers. The female definite article, given in the accusative case to show time, is missing its terminal 'ν'; the letter taph is poorly formed, resembling the Latin 't' rather than the Greek 'τ', and both words 'day' and 'Archangel' are misspelled. The initials are written in capitals, whereas the words 'on the day of' are in lower case text, before the name of the Archangel again in capitals: the emphasis may be used to indicate religious penitence and respect.

The rest of the graffiti are concentrated in the eastern part of the church. In some areas calcite deposits cover the script and make it difficult or impossible to read. Multiple hands have added graffiti to the same surface. This clustering of texts can be explained either by lack of space or the fact that existing graffiti can attract new graffiti.²⁹ The practice of writing graffiti invites imitation and thereby creates and preserves non-prescribed practices into social memory: writing on the wall becomes something that people do without conscious awareness of why it happens the way it does. The existing evidence suggests that both men and women's names are recorded. It is uncertain whether these graffiti record only the names of people who visited the church, or whether the inscriptions have other functions, for example as memorials to the deceased.³⁰ This is not improbable as already from the Early Byzantine

27. Data from genealogical research on the Detsis name, including a list with all Detsis that are recorded in the registers of male births, can be found at 'Detsis genealogy' <http://detsisgeneo.blogspot.gr/> created and managed by Nikos Detsis.

28. 8th November; it is worth noting that the north chapel of Theoskepasti at Komiaki is also dedicated to the Taxiarch, Aslanidis (2015), p. 213.

29. Yasin (2015), pp. 40-41.

30. For such an example see Champion (2015), p. 172 where the names of three dead children are inscribed in the walls of the church.

period there are graffiti in churches recording the names of both the dead and the living. On Naxos, for example, there are a number of Early Byzantine graffiti in the church of Panagia Drosiani.³¹ The practice did not die with the centuries: the sanctuary apse of the same church has modern graffiti on top of the frescoes of the Apostles: a man recorded his first and last name and (perhaps) the year of his visit (Ανδριώτης Στυλιανός, εν ετει 1907 - Stylianos Andriotis in the year 1907).

This phenomenon is common in Greece. The now-ruinous Agios Isidoros in Mani, perhaps the only example of a Byzantine church with aniconic decoration in that area, is also covered with early modern graffiti. In most cases these graffiti are considered to be ‘illegitimate’, and the modern-day visitor to Byzantine churches in Greece is often confronted with signs instructing them not to write on the walls. A closer look frequently reveals that the surface of the plaster is covered with script, which raises the question of how these writings should be interpreted. Are they material remnants of impious acts alone or do they point to a broader desire to leave one’s mark on – and thereby become part of – the story of the church? Although writing graffiti might be considered vandalism today, it may not have been in the past. Understanding that practise as part of the history of the monument and the landscape can help us understand the heritage value of the monument through the centuries. The graffiti in the Theoskepasti suggest that local people actively engaged with the place, acknowledged it, claimed it and transformed it from what seems to have been a rather ruinous and neglected monument to a place of value for their community.

The church and the post-medieval landscape

The Theoskepasti church is tiny today. At ground level, the space of the nave measures just 3.77 m from the west wall to the back of the apse and only 2.15 m north-south at its widest point (along the east wall). For such a diminutive structure it is a surprisingly complex building. Careful examination of the building along with accurate 3D survey (produced using a terrestrial laser scanner) demonstrates that it has a rather longer and much more interesting history than first meets the eye. In this sense, it provides an excellent metaphor for the surrounding landscape, which also conceals a complex history.

The west doorway (0.74 m wide and 1.60 m high, single-splayed internally) is built from limestone with occasional marble and tufa blocks; there is no door. The north jamb and arch appear to have been rebuilt after the wall, and are bonded with a weak, earthy mortar (though repointed in patches with cement). Several stones of the lower parts of the arch on both sides have fallen out of the doorway (**fig. 5**). The west wall appears to form part of an extensive post-medieval repair to the church. At the NW and SW corners of the present building, the lower parts of this wall (up to the lowest courses of the roof vault) appear to be bonded seamlessly into the interior north and south walls of the church, and also the exterior north and south walls. The upper part of the west wall clearly post-dates both phases of the roof vault and was apparently completed after all the other walls of the existing building had been constructed. Internally, the south wall with its blind arcade belongs to this phase, apart from the arcade pier and part of an earlier wall within the arcade. On the north side, the post-medieval masonry extends eastward from the west wall only 1.10 m. All the internal and external stone walls which belong to this late repair of the church are built in a similar way with roughly coursed, roughly squared limestone blocks and small stones laid between them to even up the courses.

At the top of the interior walls, masonry in a very similar style continues to form the lowest few courses of the roof vault on both the north and south sides. This masonry, and also much of the existing north, west and south walls, appears to have been inserted between the top of the walls and an existing roof vault. The earlier roof has a more rubbly character with fewer large, regular stones and is demar-

31. Drandakis (1988), pp. 45-51.

cated by a build-up of calcite from longer exposure to rainwater percolating through the roof. Within both the north and south arcades, small niches which now contain icons have been cut into earlier fabric. The niche on the north side is roughly finished with limestone jambs, though the lintel and sill are now missing; that on the south side has been neatly finished with a wall of small, roughly squared limestone blocks bonded with mortar.

The date the church took its present form remains uncertain: it seems likely to have been in the post-medieval period, though possibly as late as the early years of the 20th century. The render in the apse which provides the writing surface for the graffiti discussed above was added after the major repairs to the north, south and west walls were completed, so they cannot have been made later than about 1910 since the graffiti dates from at least that time.

To the west of the church, a long, sinuous drystone pasture boundary extends approximately N-S past the site; the fact that it curves slightly around the church to the west hints that the building already had its present form when this long drystone wall was constructed. A number of stones in the drystone wall have mortar adhering to them, presumably because they had once been used in the fabric of the church. Twenty-five metres to the south of the church the wall turns sharply west and plummets downwards over earlier terraces which are largely hidden now below the scrubby juniper forest. This enclosure wall delimits a large, sub-oval area approximately 270 m by 230 m which drops steeply below Theoskepasti into a shallow basin defined by rocky outcrops on the western side, before the mountain plunges once again to the plain. On the opposite side of the enclosure from Theoskepasti, just below the lip of the basin and hidden from the land below, are the roofless remains of several post-medieval buildings. They include at least two small houses, domestic enclosures and a threshing floor. The buildings are typical of late 18th- and early 19th-century farmsteads on Naxos, with uncoursed and unmortared limestone rubble, and stone-built features including beds and cupboards.³² Whilst small enclosures and cupboards for cool storage suggest the people who lived here were engaged in pastoral activities, the large threshing floor implies arable farming on the terraces that climb the mountainside above. It seems likely that the repairs to the church may have coincided with this period of renewed occupation in the shallow bowl below the long-deserted kastro.

A longer history for Theoskepasti

The post-medieval farmers and shepherds who built the little drystone houses below the church were drawn to the site not only by the pasture of the mountainside, but also because their crops would grow well on the deeper soil of the terraces there. Whether these terraces had been used continuously before the post-medieval cultivators came to live here is uncertain, but what is clear is that they substantially predated their settlement. In common with virtually all the 'braided' terraces on Naxos, the examples around Apalirou lie beneath (and are therefore earlier than) the later drystone pasture boundaries which snake up the mountainsides. The evidence here (considered briefly below) and elsewhere on the island suggests such terraces are most likely Byzantine or medieval in date, though some may also be earlier.³³

Like the terraced hillside itself, close scrutiny of the Theoskepasti church shows it is not simply a post-medieval building as generally assumed, but that it has a much longer history comprising at least two phases of probably Byzantine architecture. Inside the church much of the south wall and the western part of the north wall were rebuilt in post-medieval times, but the new fabric here replaced earlier

32. Veronis (2009), pp. 39-52.

33. Crow *et al.* (2011).

walls whose remains can still be detected. They are represented inside the church on the south side by the surviving pier to the west of the blind arcade, and on the north side by both the piers and the arch of the northern blind arcade which links them. It is unclear whether the post-medieval fabric in the western part of the north and south interior walls replaced a continuing blind arcade or simply wall fabric. Either would be possible, but the straight joint in the masonry on the west side of both surviving piers hints at the former (another possibility is that there were two phases of 'inner' wall, first with a blind arcade of two or more arches, rebuilt in a second phase with a continuous wall west of the easternmost arcade). These blind arcades and piers seem to have been part of the second major phase of the structure: they were built *inside* the north and south walls of an earlier building. In the north-east corner of the existing church the stone vault of the roof appears to sit directly on the remodelled 'inner' northern wall and arcade in the area where the likely medieval fabric survives to roof height. The reason for the addition of blind arcades inside the earlier structure is uncertain, but they may have been designed to strengthen it or support the stone vaulted roof. Similar piers and arcades were added at a number of other Byzantine churches in the vicinity, including both parts of the 'Olive Church' (the building remembered by Mr Manolis, which lies 75 m downhill of Theoskepasti) and at Agios Stephanos at Marathos, in the plain 1.6 km to the south and just beyond the tip of the mountain's southernmost arm.

Close examination also shows that now ruinous walling underlies and projects beyond the exterior post-medieval walls. These fragments of masonry appear to represent the original lines of the structure's earliest walls on both the northern and southern sides of the current structure (**fig. 6**). The laser-scan data show that the upper sections of the interior north wall within the north arcade of the current church and the masonry visible at ground level *outside* the north wall are likely to be part of the same structure. If so, at least the eastern part of the northern 'outer' wall must be later in date than the piers and blind arcade since the latter abut extensive patches of wall plaster adhering to the elevation of the 'outer' wall which are visible to both the eastern and western sides of the arcade opening (**fig. 7**). Both the data from laser scanning and the visible profile of the roof vault above the current west wall also suggest that the vaulted stone roof was originally carried by the early 'inner' walls of the church's second phase. It is not impossible that the miracle commemorated in the name of Theoskepasti was the survival of this vault, despite a presumably ruinous lower structure, until new supporting walls were built in the post-medieval period.

The apse itself is also likely to belong to this earliest phase of the church, though the junction between the two phases of probably Byzantine walls and the east wall has been obscured internally by later rebuilding and rendering; externally the relationships between these parts of the fabric are currently obscured by fallen rubble, scree and earth. Nevertheless, the visible patches of masonry in the apse and the northern and southern 'outer' walls are very similar, being made up of irregular, roughly-coursed limestone blocks.

Finally, it seems that in its likely Byzantine phases the church was considerably larger than it is today. Further stretches of both the 'outer' and 'inner' walls are visible projecting on both the northern and southern sides of the church. On the south side both the 'outer' and 'inner' walls clearly continue for 0.75 m beyond the west wall of the standing building, which hints that in this phase the wall was continuous rather than arcaded. On the southern side, what appears to be a continuation of the 'outer' wall is visible amidst the rubble where the pasture boundary is in ruins, continuing to a point 3.6 m west of the standing church's west wall where the hillside begins to drop away more steeply. (On the northern side, the projecting lines of the likely Byzantine walls are obscured by the later drystone pasture boundary which lies over its presumed course). Although it is not possible to make a direct stratigraphic link without excavation, the laser scan data show the structure on the south side aligns horizontally and vertically with the early fabric which projects below the west end of the church's southern wall. This evidence strongly suggests that in its first two (or possibly three) phases the church was likely to have been twice as long as it is today (**fig. 8**).

The Theoskepasti church is therefore much older than previously suspected and in its earliest incarnations was probably much bigger. The question remains as to whether there is any evidence which can help us understand when the church was first built and why this apparently lonely mountainside was chosen for its site. The form of the building is not particularly helpful in this respect: a simple barrel-vaulted chapel of this type might have been constructed at any time from Late Antiquity up until the recent past. Likewise the insertion of piers and simple blind arcades might reasonably be dated between the 7th and the 12th centuries, or perhaps to any time before the restorations of recent centuries (although local comparanda like Agios Stephanos suggest a Byzantine date is most likely).

It is perhaps by considering the evidence of the wider landscape that we can establish the most likely date for the foundation and development of the building. The proximity of the so-called ‘Olive Church’, a ruinous structure with two parallel aisles that appears to have been excavated illegally in the mid-20th century, hints that the hillside may conceal a more complex story. This area was the focus of detailed fieldwork by AEP in 2015 and 2016, and interim results are beginning to confirm that it was the site of a significant settlement in the Early and Middle Byzantine periods.³⁴ The most obvious pre-modern activity was the construction and maintenance of agricultural terraces which are typical of the region. The complex morphology of these terraces and field walls formed part of an earlier study of Naxos using remote sensing.³⁵ Since 2015 our project has developed a programme to record and sample the terraces, which have so often been neglected by archaeologists, including the use of new methodologies to date their development.³⁶ At the same time fieldwalking using the intensive method developed on Antikythera³⁷ has yielded thousands of ceramic sherds from around nine hectares to the west of Theoskepasti. Provisional analysis suggests these finds date almost exclusively between the 7th and 10th centuries, along with a tiny number of post-medieval objects. Finally, detailed survey of earthworks and fragmentary structural remains is beginning to reveal the presence of numerous drystone buildings and platforms, with more than 50 individual structures identified to date. The best explanation for the presence of several churches here is surely that they were built as part of this early medieval settlement, which extended for more than 300 m down the mountainside below the kastro.

An interim conclusion

At first sight, a semi-ruinous chapel with smudged graffiti and a few modern icons might not seem worthy of detailed study, but careful examination reveals a rich history and a place of significance in a landscape whose story has unfolded over several millennia (**fig. 9**). Every time the church has been visited, the character of the building and its role in the wider landscape has been negotiated and re-invented by the visitors: different people in different times have experienced it in new ways, shaping aspects of its character and also creating new understandings of its heritage. Theoskepasti still provides a sacred space, fit for prayers, and actively used by local people who acknowledge the building as part of their ‘*topos*’ – their place. In recent times the graffiti and the ‘*obbligio*’ marked the church as a devotional focus for pilgrimage on special days, practices which are not only individual but also inherently social and communal. Care for the church, with repair and rebuilding over the long centuries, means it still provides a reference point in the landscape. The value of the church as ‘heritage’ does not rest simply in the state of the building, but in the role it plays in people’s perception of the landscape and of themselves.

34. Crow *et al.* (2017).

35. Crow *et al.* (2011); Turner and Crow (2010).

36. See e.g. Kinnaird *et al.* (2017).

37. Bevan and Connolly (2013).

The tiny church of Theoskepasti is like a microcosm, condensing reminders of past and present communities who are silently present in the fabric of the walls, the writing on the render, the liturgical objects and icons stashed in the niches. But the microcosm of the church finds its place in a wider landscape: the macrocosm of the mountain and the island of Naxos where Byzantines built houses, shepherds move their herds through the old terraces, tourists hunt for ruins, vultures for food, looters for gold and archaeologists for answers. The landscape becomes a kaleidoscope of heritage for all the people who have dwelt there and everyone who visits now, as well as those who remember the place they used to know. All of them shape the heritage which communities of the future will share. The aim of our project in the environs of Apalirou is to carry out research that will help us understand how the elements in this landscape have related to one another since ancient times, but also help reveal and strengthen the value of the landscape's story as cultural heritage for all the people who are tangled up with it in one way or another.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the kind support, advice, assistance and hard work of all their collaborators in the Apalirou research project, especially Dr Dimitris Athanassoulis (Ephorate of the Cyclades), Professor Knut Ødegård (University of Oslo) and Professor Jim Crow (University of Edinburgh). Sophia Karavias has helped enormously with practical matters, and the Lekakis family have been far kinder and more hospitable than might reasonably be expected. The research has been supported by generous grants from Dumbarton Oaks (Washington, DC), the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council and the European Commission (H2020-MSCA-IF-2014 grant 657050). The project is also supported by the McCord Centre for Landscape, Newcastle University and the School of History, Classics and Archaeology, University of Edinburgh.

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Figure 1. The Theoskepasti church (foreground) and the steep mountainside below Apalirou, looking north-west across the plain of Lathrina towards the distant village of Sangri. (Photo: Sam Turner).



Figure 2. Niche in the south wall, with icon, lamp and plastic boxes containing incense, a lighter, wicks and other objects. (Photo: Sam Turner).



Figure 3. The roughly-built drystone altar (with censer) which today stands before the apse of the church. (Photo: Sam Turner).



Figure 4. Graffiti on the north side of the east wall commemorating visits to the church by local man Christos Detsis and others. (Photo: Vicky Manolopoulou).

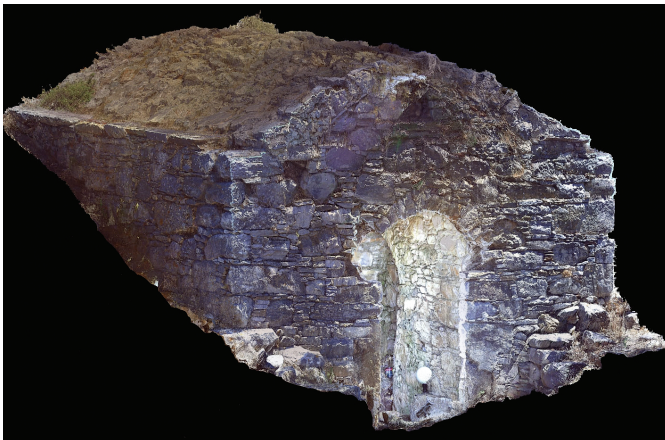


Figure 5. Image based on 3D data collected using terrestrial laser scanning which shows the north and west external elevations and a profile of the ground level immediately outside the church. Note projecting stubs of earlier masonry on both the south and north sides of the building's west elevation. (Image: Sam Turner and Alex Turner).

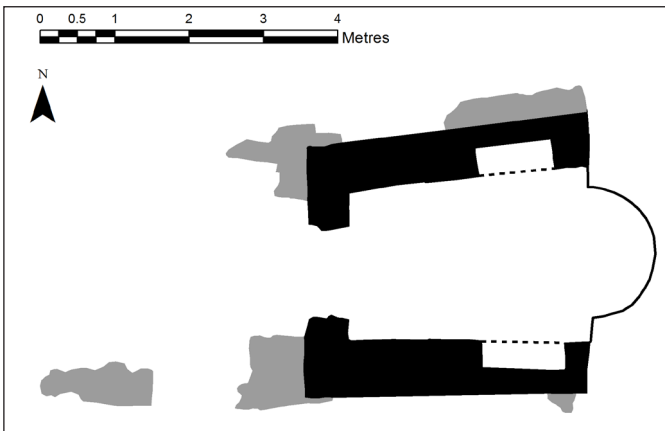
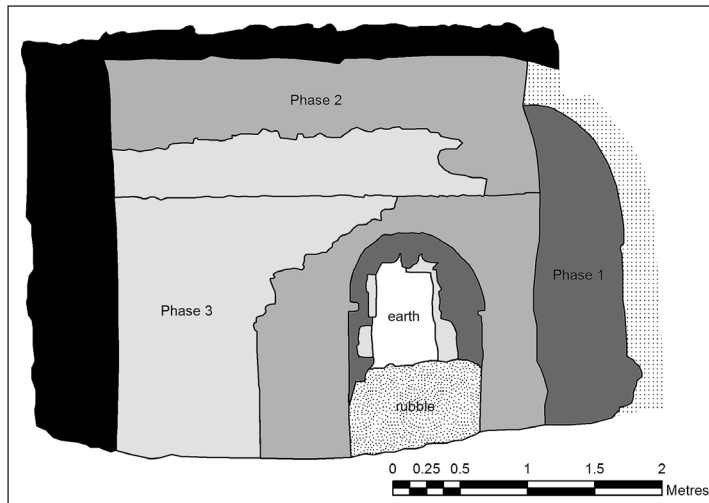


Figure 6. The Theoskepasti church: a plan of the current building (black), with visible sections of ruined walling (grey) and the inferred line of earlier walls (hatched). The east wall of the current structure is of unknown thickness since it is buried into the adjacent hillside. (Image: Sam Turner and Alex Turner).



of the lower part of the roof vault was rebuilt during the post-medieval period. (Black indicates the cross-section of standing west wall and vault; stipple the eastern (apse) wall, which is of unknown thickness). (Image: Sam Turner and Alex Turner).

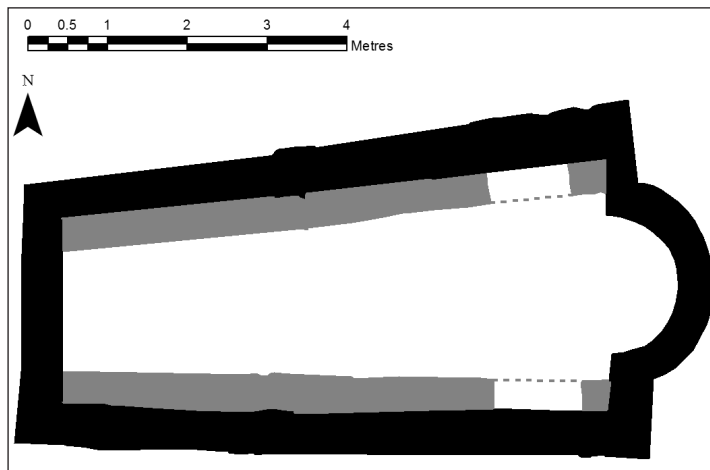


Figure 7.

An interpretation of the built fabric in the interior elevation of the north wall of the Theoskepasti church, based on laser scan data and field survey. The earliest fabric is probably found in the apse and inside the north arcade (Phase 1), though a later niche has been cut into the stonework within the arcade to reveal packed earth which is outside the line of the current church walls. The upper section of the stone roof vault is carried on the pier and arcade in the north-west corner of the building, and they are likely to be contemporary (Phase 2). The western section of the north wall and much

Figure 8.

An interpretation of the two likely Byzantine phases of the Theoskepasti church. In the first phase (shown in black) the building appears to have been around 7.75 x 3.15 m internally. In the second phase, the 'inner' walls may have been arcaded (rather than continuous, as shown in grey here west of the existing blind arcades). (Image: Sam Turner).



Figure 9. The Theoskepasti church viewed from the south. The post-medieval drystone pasture boundary can be seen to the west (left); it kinks slightly around the church and runs over the remains of the ruined western section, which is probably of Early Byzantine date. (Photo: Sam Turner).