NEMEA, SANCTUARY OF ZEUS EXCAVATIONS AT 100

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Research at the archaeological site of Ancient Nemea (Sanctuary of Zeus) in 2024 included the architectural study of the Early Christian Basilica (5thc. CE) and the installation and opening of the exhibit Nemea 100 commemorating 100 years of excavation at the site, and the study of unpublished legacy finds from the sanctuary.

The excavation and conservation project on the Early Christian Basilica, located in the archaeological site of Ancient Nemea (Sanctuary of Zeus), consists of the excavation of fills to reveal the walls and various floor levels and the conservation of the foundations, where the ancient mortar has disintegrated from exposure to the elements, to stabilize and preserve the original masonry remains. Considered one of the earliest Christian structures founded in the Peloponnese, the Basilica was constructed during the 5th century CE. Situated near the center of the pagan sanctuary, the Basilica not only was built on top of an earlier structure of antiquity, in this case the *Xenon* (a housing structure for participants in the Nemean games), but also was constructed largely of materials (*spolia*) pillaged from the 4th century BCE Temple of Zeus (Figure 1). The re-excavation and conservation of the Basilica permits us to publish the results of multiple excavation campaigns, and especially to highlight to visitors not just the Panhellenic sanctuary, one of the four major crown sanctuaries of the Greek world, but also its diachronic cult use into the Christian period.

The second phase of the multi-year project was continued 3-21 June and 1-5 July 2024, while the third study phase is on-going through winter and spring. The new comprehensive architectural and conservation study of the monument, which came at the request of the Korinthian Ephoreia, was initiated in 2023 with the holistic recording of all visible masonry, except for Room 3, which was completed in summer 2024. Architects who specialize in cultural heritage monuments, their stabilization, and restoration, when necessary, are analyzing data from the pre-study recording to submit a study proposal for completion in spring 2025.

To prepare for the study, with the participation of our workmen, and undergraduate and graduate student team, we cleaned the current surface of overgrowth across the entire monument and the areas surrounding it. Room 3, a later addition to the basilica's south wall, south of the aisle of the nave, was fully cleared of post-excavation fill (rubbish-laden) so that the walls could be fully photographed, drawn and scanned (Figure 2). This included: measurements, documenting their current state, the source building, and initially recommended conservation; special recording sheets were designed for this project in consultation with the architects. This recording was done for individual blocks and stretches of fragmentary walls that were mapped, drawn, and photographed as well. All of the individual blocks and foundation walls were digitally recorded as well using 3D lidar scans. It is here that we found the covered terracotta drain that ran along the south wall of the Xenon to the Bath and the 4thc. BCE road surface which transected the site, in this case parallel to the Xenon. Both Rooms 1 and 3 were then fully backfilled with clean soil over a layer of *geoyphasma* and fine gravel.

Archival work continues on both sides of the Atlantic, in the Nemea Center on the UC Berkeley campus and at the ASCSA, to collect and consolidate all records of the legacy excavations on and through the monument in the 1920s by Blegen and Hill, in the 1960s by Williams, and in 1980 by Miller. Many blocks in and around the foundation are not in the position they were when excavated (Figure 3), and we must document those changes and map out a conservation/restoration plan.

Parallel to the study of the basilica architecture we completed a third study season in the Nemea Museum that focused on the unpublished legacy material from all excavations of the basilica. Primarily sherds, which will be instrumental to dating the building phases of the monument, the artifacts include a wide range of materials – glass, metal, ceramic. The study and ultimately the publication of the legacy finds will illuminate the functional complexity of the basilica which complements the architectural study.

On April 15-16, 2024, an international conference was held on campus celebrating the 100th anniversary of the first excavation at Nemea and the 50th anniversary of UC Berkeley's excavations at the site. Carl Blegen and Bert Hodge-Hill, of the University of Cincinnati, initiated excavations in the Sanctuary of Zeus at Nemea on April 16, 1924, while Stephen Miller began the UCB excavations in April 1974. *Nemea 100: from Blegen to Berkeley and Beyond* brought together a diverse group of scholars who work or have worked at Nemea.

On June 3rd, one hundred years to the day from the close of Blegen's first excavation season, we opened a special photographic exhibit in the Nemea Museum (Figure 4) to commemorate the anniversary of the start of projects at Nemea: in 1924 by Blegen and Hill, in 1962/1964 by Williams; in 1974 by Miller; and in 2004 with the creation of the Nemea Center for Classical Archaeology. The photographs featured what the excavations were like in those different periods, especially focused on the people involved. In order to identify individuals who were not labeled in the archives, we have a QR code for visitors to record anyone they can identify especially a family member or long-time resident of the area. The museum opening included remarks from local and regional officials as well as brief talks from the Assistant Director of the American School for Classical Studies at Athens and the Director of the Nemea Center for Classical Archaeology.

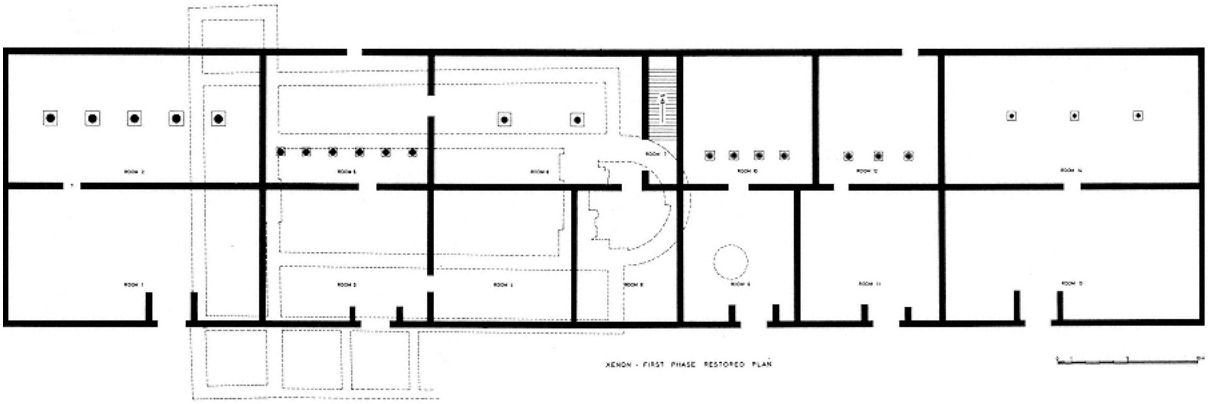

Figure 1. Basilica plan (dotted lines) over the 4thc. BCE *Xenon* building

Figure 2. Basilica, Room 3, North wall after cleaning

Figure 3. monolithic column reused in the basilica – not *in situ*

Figure 4. The Nemea 100 exhibit in the Archaeological Museum of Ancient Nemea