

# Berit Wells in memoriam

## Introduction

The following section honours our colleague, teacher, and friend, Berit Wells. The contributions were originally to be included in a *Festschrift*, which we wished to present to Berit on her 67th birthday. Sadly, Berit lost her battle against cancer before we could finish the volume. We thus decided to transform the *Festschrift* into a conference dedicated to her memory, and this event took place over two cold winter days in December 2009. For the *Festschrift* we had chosen two themes: religion and food production in the ancient Greek world. The interface of these very broad themes seemed to us to converge and offer an overall perspective of Berit's research and simultaneously, they allowed colleagues from all stages of Berit's careers to take part and contribute to the conference. The six articles included in *Opuscula* 2014 are a selection of the conference papers, which also included reports from the Poros excavations. Poros was Berit's last major project and its results will be published elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

## Life and scholarly career

Berit was born into a family of farmers in the southernmost region of Sweden, Skåne. She became the first in her family to graduate from high school and then proudly went on to study at Lund University. One of the topics of Berit's studies at Lund was archaeology. She participated in some excavations in Sweden, but she was to dedicate her scholarly career to Greek archaeology: decisive factors for this choice were certainly the two semesters spent at the Swedish Institute at Athens in 1970–1971 and her work at the Asine excavations

in 1972. Although Berit had visited Greece previously (for the first time in 1963, as a member of the US Peace Corps with a mission to install water pipes in a remote and poor Epirote village), it was in the early 70s that her love of Greece also turned into a passion for its history and archaeology. Asine became the topic of the doctoral dissertation that Berit successfully defended in 1983. Her study of Asine's pottery was not limited to an examination of ceramic remains, but reached out to touch upon various aspects of life on this coastal site and demonstrated a Bronze Age–Iron Age continuity of the Asine settlement.

Berit Wells held the post of assistant director of the Swedish Institute at Athens between 1985 and 1987. After an intercession as a post-doctoral scholar at Göteborg University (1987–1991), she returned to Athens as senior researcher and director of the Institute (1994–2003); she was the first woman to hold this post. At the Institute she distinguished herself as a skilled administrator and a highly appreciated teacher; but Berit was always first and foremost a field archaeologist. Significantly, during her years in Athens she initiated and headed a number of important field campaigns; among these were excavations on the Barbouna Hill and at the Great Bastion of the Hellenistic fortifications around the acropolis at Asine (1985, 1990), a surface survey in the Berbati Valley and the Limnes area (1988–1990), excavations at Pyrgouthi (a Hellenistic tower west of the cemetery in the Berbati Valley), investigations of a 5th-century BC kiln site and a defensive tower site along the so-called "*Kontoporeia*", the shortest road distance-wise from Argos to Corinth (1995 & 1997), an intensive surface survey at the Mastos Hill in the western part of the Berbati Valley (1999), and, finally, excavations on the Saronic island of Poros (ancient Kalaureia) focusing on daily life in the island's famous sanctuary of Poseidon (1997–2009).

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<sup>1</sup> A. Penttinen & D. Mylona forthcoming.

## Berbati and Poros

The works on Berbati and Poros will perhaps stand as Berit Wells' most important scholarly contributions.<sup>2</sup> Berbati was literally bequeathed to her by her mentor Åke Åkerström (a former director of the Institute) during his final visit to the site in 1987. Archaeological survey and landscape archaeology were very much in fashion in the mid-1980s. The Berbati Valley and the uplands of Limnes offered an ideal location for such an investigation since the area was secluded and, as of yet, not very affected by the destructive techniques of modern agriculture. In research literature, Berbati was basically known as a Bronze Age site, but the survey conducted in 1988–1990 brought other periods, such as the Late Classical/Early Hellenistic and the Late Antique periods to light, and thus a better understanding of the rural economy of the area was reached.

The first ever excavations conducted by Swedish archaeologists in Greece took place in the Sanctuary of Poseidon at Kalaureia on Poros in 1894. The Swedish Institute at Athens was invited to resume the investigations in the sanctuary in 1996, and Berit, with characteristic courage and energy, did not hesitate. The excavations were initiated in 1997, and it quickly became obvious that the site had huge potential for further research. The 1894 excavations had focused exclusively on the sanctuary's architectural remains, leaving the archaeologically more rewarding interiors of the buildings basically untouched. In two subsequent research projects, both of which were funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, *The Physical environment and daily life in the Sanctuary of Poseidon at Kalaureia* in 2003–2005, and *The Sea, the City and the God* 2007–2012, the sanctuary was investigated further, primarily targeting the question of what kind of activities took place inside and outside the sanctuary proper. Much emphasis was put on a systematic collection of soil samples and studies of micro-finds, in search of information on dietary habits during various periods as well as the various environmental factors that af-

ected people's lives. Berit was very proud of focusing on these kinds of techniques because, although they are commonplace in excavations at prehistoric sites, they are still somewhat rare in investigations of sites of the historical periods.



## The selected conference contributions

As noted above, the broad main themes we chose for this celebration of Berit's work were leitmotifs in her life and research. A particular interest in agriculture and food production is certainly echoed in the investigations she conducted in the Berbati Valley and at Poros, where she directed research towards questions on the dietary habits of the sanctuary's visitors, for example. Her own rural background played an important role in creating this interest; she often commented on this herself. Berit's interest in ancient Greek religion was also clearly articulated in the scholarly agenda of the Poros excavations, but this particular subject had been inspiring to many generations of her students before the initiation of this project. Berit was

<sup>2</sup> *Mastos in the Berbati Valley. An intensive archaeological study* (ActaAth-4<sup>o</sup>, 54), eds. M. Lindblom & B. Wells, Stockholm 2011; *The Berbati-Limnes archaeological survey 1988–1990* (ActaAth-4<sup>o</sup>, 44), ed. B. Wells in collaboration with C. Runnels, Stockholm 1996; B. Wells, 'A smiting-god-figurine found in the Sanctuary of Poseidon at Kalaureia', *OpAthRom* 2, 2009, 143–149; B. Wells *et al.*, 'Report on the excavations to the southeast of the Temple to Poseidon at Kalaureia in 2007 and 2008', *OpAthRom* 2, 2009, 89–141; B. Wells *et al.*, 'The Kalaureia Excavation Project: The 2004 and 2005 seasons', *OpAth* 31–32, 2008, 31–129; B. Wells *et al.*, 'The Kalaureia Excavation Project: The 2003 season', *OpAth* 30, 2005, 127–215; B. Wells *et al.*, 'Investigations in the Sanctuary of Poseidon at Kalaureia, 1997–2001', *OpAth* 28, 2004, 29–87; B. Wells, 'The sanctuary of Poseidon at Kalaureia. The investigations of 1997', in *ARGOSARONIKOS. 1st International conference on the history and archaeology of the Argo-Saronic Gulf*, vol. 1, ed. E. Konsolaki-Yannopoulou, Poros 2003, 337–347.

a fantastic on-site teacher, and the religious aspects of ancient Greece were always present during her “field lectures”. She often expressed admiration for fellow Swede Martin P. Nilsson, who in fact had a similar background to hers. He was a farm boy from the Skåne region of southern Sweden, who went on to become one of the most acclaimed scholars in the field of Classical antiquity.

The following six contributions treat various aspects of the symposium’s double theme—sometimes intertwined, sometimes separately. They cover a large time-span: the first four take their subject matter from the historical periods of Greece, and the two remaining contributions present topics from Greek prehistory. It is our hope that their variety will mirror the wide-ranging interests of the scholar Berit Wells.

Gunnel Ekroth’s paper ‘Castration, cult and agriculture: Perspectives on Greek animal sacrifice’ is the first in this collection of papers. It is an examination of the role of the uncastrated male animal in an alimentary and religious context, and has a wide scope. By looking at literary, epigraphical, iconographical, archaeological and, to a certain extent, osteological material, she demonstrates how the negligence of previous scholarship as regards the castrated/uncastrated status of a male bovine, for example, can prove to be highly misleading. Contrary to common opinions, which are usually based on iconography and literature, the picture provided by epigraphical sources such as sacrificial calendars and so-called “sacred laws” indicates that uncastrated animals were actually very rare as sacrificial victims. One contributing factor was perhaps the fact that they were more expensive than castrated or female victims, but furthermore, uncastrated males were probably rare in flocks since they are difficult to manage, and their meat often became less tasty (castration promotes a fatter meat, and, in the case of sheep, the production of more wool).

Neither the high frequency of cattle as victims in vase paintings nor the stress on uncastrated sacrificial animals in literature corresponds to sacrificial reality, and another explanation is thus required. Ekroth proposes that we should interpret the many bulls, rams, etc., found in iconography and literary sources as portraying “the ultimate, desired sacrificial situation, where the most prestigious and expensive animal could be offered, no matter the cost involved”. The uncastrated male was the ideal victim; however, in reality, the choice of sacrificial animals had to match the available economical means and the “agricultural reality”, such as, for example, the availability of certain animals at a certain time of the year.

Ekroth then discusses those cases where uncastrated males actually were offered. In some cases, the answer probably lies within the recipient deity, and in other cases, in the nature of the ritual. In a final important section, Ekroth concludes that the attitudes to the castration of animals clearly mirror religious and cultural concepts: for example, for the Greeks,

castration apparently did not play an important role in ritual, but the uncastrated nature of the victim did.

Charlotte Scheffer’s paper, ‘Cooking stands and braziers in Greek sanctuaries’ examines what happened to the meat of sacrificial animals, castrated or not, and she discusses evidence for food preparation in Greek sanctuaries. That food was consumed inside sanctuaries has long been established, not least because of the reoccurring presence of dining rooms inside the *temene*. But where was it prepared, and how? Scheffer surveys evidence from *hestiatoria* identified within the sanctuary space and identifies possible kitchen areas, mainly through the remains of hearths, supports for cooking stands or burners for cooking pots, and even stoves. Scheffer concludes that cooking stands and similar objects were not used to a higher degree in cult practice than in domestic contexts. She discusses the poor quota of finds of braziers or cooking stands in sanctuaries and suggests that this lacuna may be due to the fact that cooking in sanctuaries mostly had to do with preparing the sacrificial meat. The innards, *splanchna*, were grilled on spits that we actually do find in sanctuary contexts, and Scheffer proposes that the rest of the meat was most often cooked in large cauldrons placed on metal tripods or *lasana*, which were later removed, melted down and reused for other purposes.

Literal connections between religion and food production can be found in the realm of inscriptions, as seen in the two following papers, both of which discuss epigraphical material. In her article ‘New inscriptions in the Bodrum Museum. A Hellenistic foundation from the area of Mylasa’, Signe Isager brings to the fore three inscriptions from Asia Minor. Each of the three inscriptions includes an imprecation, asking that violators of certain stipulated conditions may suffer infertility: that the earth bear them no fruit and that they be deprived of descendants.

Jenny Wallensten’s contribution, ‘Karpophoroi deities and the Attic cult of Ge. Notes on *IG II<sup>2</sup> 4758*’, then highlights an instance where it seems that the Earth indeed had stopped bearing fruit. An inscription from the Athenian Acropolis designates a small area to the goddess Ge Karpophoros (Fruit-bearing Earth), which according to Pausanias (1.24.3) was consecrated after a severe drought. Wallensten’s study surveys the epithet Karpophoros and then, through a discussion of the use of epithets within Greek dedicatory language, offers an interpretation for its meaning in this specific Athenian context.

After the two epigraphic essays, Sarah P. Morris brings the archaeological sources back into focus in her article entitled ‘Dairy Queen? Churns and milk products in the Aegean and beyond’. She discusses an unusual type of vessel that has been identified in Early Bronze Age domestic contexts of the north Aegean and north-west Anatolia. These were earlier known as “barrel vessels”, against the background of finds from the chalcolithic Near East (where it is notable that miniature ver-

sions of the vessels have been found not only in settlements but also in burials and cult places); they are now understood to be churns. Morris traces the appearance of the northern Aegean ceramic churns back to the Final Neolithic Balkans; however, she refrains from trying to pinpoint one specific area of origin for all finds of the vessel, since they certainly originated as utensils made of animal skin, which leave no trace in the archaeological record. Through unique *in situ* finds, Morris proceeds to present an interpretation of the short life and the subsequent demise of the ceramic, horizontally suspended churns: namely, that these portable vessels, which were suitable for outdoor use where they were exposed to intense sunlight, became replaced by fixed, vertical churns that were used indoors, near the warmth of a hearth.

The closing paper 'A note on domestic vs communal grain storage in the Early Helladic period' also focuses on Greece in the prehistoric period. Monica Nilsson investigates remains of possible Early Helladic granaries in order to present a new interpretation of economic management in settlements of this period, as well as its development over time. Through an extensive survey that covers central Greece and the Peloponnese (including Kythera), she identifies large rock-cut pits and certain built structures of the EHI to II periods as communal grana-

ries. The pits are set apart from individual household pits (*bothroi*) by their size and placement within the settlements, and the built structures clearly differ from Early Helladic living quarters: they are circular or (more rarely) of another unorthodox shape, and they all seem to have lacked doors. Nilsson argues that the management of cultivation and the storage of its produce mirror the production process. When household storage predominates (as seems to be the case in the EH III period), we get an image of the work capacity of a society's individual members, whereas centrally located palace storage reflects collective efforts and work (as for example in the Late Helladic period). The EH I–II communal granaries then seem to belong to a third context of communal management, where a settlement's resources were managed and consumed jointly by its inhabitants, in a society that thus gives the impression of sophisticated organisation combined with a non-hierarchical system.

Berit did not live to hear these papers presented in her honour. It is our conviction, however, that she would have enjoyed them, as well as the atmosphere and the milieu of The Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities in Stockholm. We are deeply grateful to the Academy, as well as to Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, for sponsoring the event and thus honouring Berit's life and work.

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