BEYOND CORINTHIAN SHADOWS: THE UNIQUE ROOFING SYSTEM OF NORTHWESTERN GREECE (700-500 BC)

Jane Kreiser*

This poster represents an excerpt from my dissertation, which focused on transregional knowledge transfer and provides in-depth insights into the roofing system of Northwestern Greece during the Archaic period. A central question was how technical knowledge about roofing was exchanged between different cultural and geographical regions. The research offers new insights into the concepts, technical aspects, chronology, characteristic features, and evolution of the Northwestern Greek roofing system (Kreiser 2024).

The present analysis challenges the assumption that the roofs of Northwestern Greece were heavily influenced by Corinthian styles or directly adopted from them. Previous theories mainly relied on the similarity of clay properties, associated with the Corinthian clay known for its light brown-beige to yellow-beige coloration. New investigations, based on recent findings of roof tiles and terracottas from Anaktorion, Palairos, and Spathari in Akarnania, provide a new perspective (fig. 1).

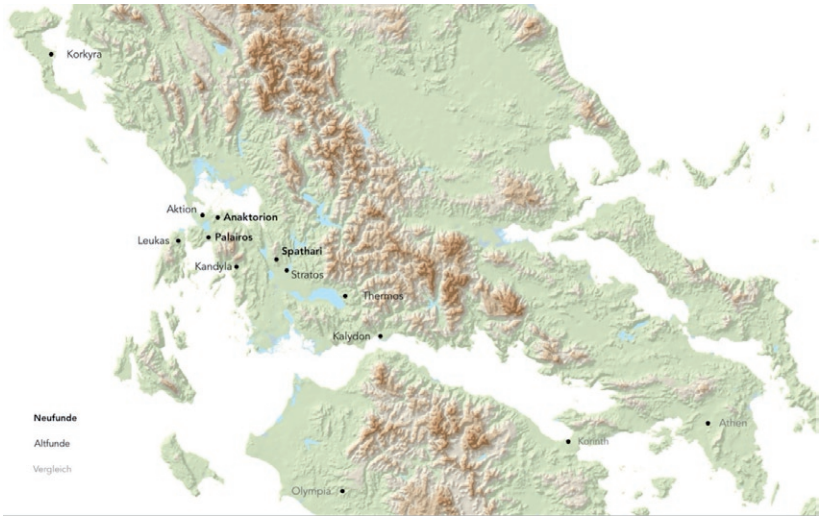


Fig. 1. Map showing new and old find spots in northwestern Greece (Lang 2013)

*Technische Universität Darmstadt (kreiser@klarch.tu-darmstadt.de)

Through archaeometric methods such as macroscopic, mineralogical (XRD), and geochemical (pEDXRF) analyses, it has been determined that the roofs examined are not Corinthian imports but rather locally produced items. These results strengthen the assessment that Northwestern Greek roofs differ significantly in technique and execution from those of Corinth. Although the exact locations of the ancient clay sources could not be determined, comparisons with raw clay samples from the sites suggest the materials used are of local origin (fig. 2).

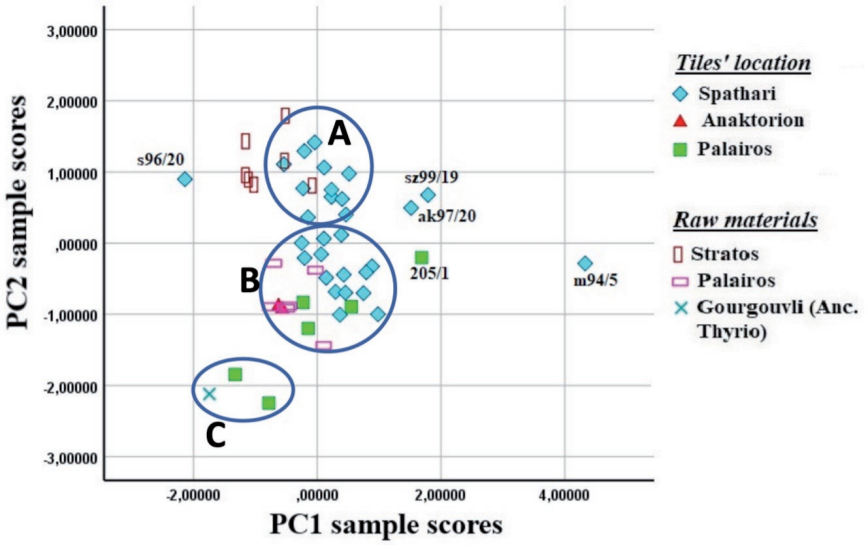


Fig. 2. PCA of the elementary compositions of the tile sherds and raw materials (Rathossi in Kreiser 2024)

Geison Tiles and the Concept of the Eaves in the Northwestern Greek Roofing System

The Geison tile, characteristic of Northwestern Greek architecture between 650 and 550 BC, is a central element that greatly contributes to understanding the regional roofing system. These tiles are indicative of the roofs of major structures, such as the Temple of Apollo at Thermos, the Temple of Hera on Corfu or Kalydon (fig. 3), and the newly discovered sites at Anaktorion, Palairos, and Spathari in Akarnania (fig. 4). They differ substantially from roofing materials found in other Greek regions, thus representing a genuine Northwestern Greek innovation.

The flat shape of these tiles, with a protruding drip nose, effectively diverted rainwater away from temple walls and wooden roof structures. In Thermos and Corfu, Geison tiles are part of a complex roof overhang, further embellished with lion-head waterspouts

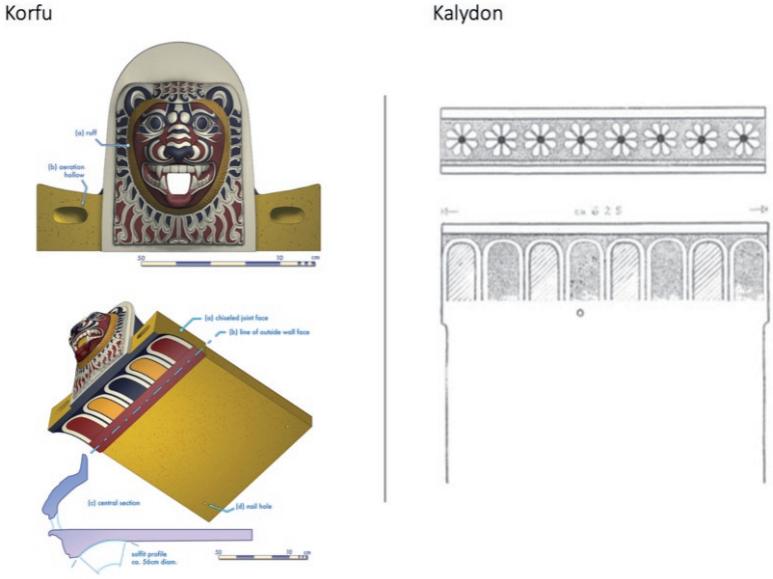


Fig. 3. Comparison between geison tiles from Corfu and Kalydon
(Corfu: Sapirstein 2012, p. 44, fig. 5; Kalydon: Dyggve 1948, pl. XVII)

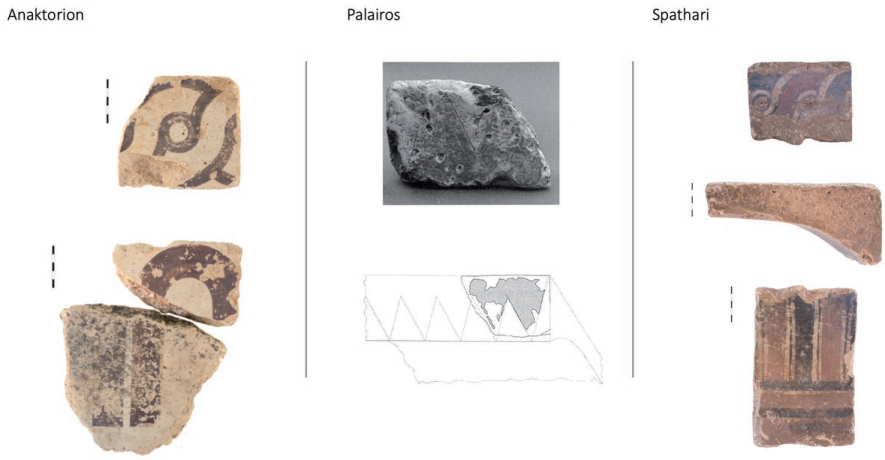


Fig. 4. Comparison between Geison tiles from Anaktorion, Palairos, and Spathari
(Anaktorion and Spathari: Kreiser 2024, Palairos: after Hinsberger 2013, Fig. 5)

and antefixes, meeting both aesthetic and functional requirements of these sanctuaries.

The concept of the 'closed eave' pursued in the Northwestern Greek system marks a departure from the Corinthian tradition. While the Corinthian system favoured open eaves with antefixes and eaves tiles, Northwestern Greece developed a closed eave with a continuous line of Geison tiles, combined with lion-head waterspouts and antefixes, emphasising the technical and aesthetic independence of the region. Later developments in Spathari and Kalydon show the integration of lion-head waterspouts directly into the sima, making antefixes partially obsolete and leading to a more harmonious roof design. This development suggests that, despite the adoption of foreign motifs, northwestern Greece maintained a unique, local interpretation, preserving its identity and technical innovation.

Conclusion

The detailed analysis of the Northwestern Greek roofing system, enriched by archaeometric studies, contributes significantly to reevaluating architectural and technical developments in the region. It offers new perspectives on ancient construction practices and cultural interactions within the Archaic world. The examination of this roofing system in light of new findings from Akarnania enables a reevaluation of the assumed Corinthian influence. The findings suggest that the transregional exchange of building techniques and aesthetic principles played a central role in the development of regional architecture, with Northwestern Greece taking an active and innovative role.

Literature

Kreiser 2024 = J. Kreiser, Tondächer aus Akarnanien. Das Nordwestgriechische Dachsystem des 7. bis 6. Jahrhunderts v. Chr. Mit einem Beitrag von Christina Rathossi (c.s.)

Picture Credits

Dyggve 1948 = E.- Dyggve, Das Laphrion: der Tempelbezirk von Kalydon, Det Kongelige danske videnskabernes selskab. Arkæologisk-kunsthistoriske skrifter, København 1948.

Hinsberger 2013 = T. Hinsberger, Die Dachterrakotten Vom Tempelplateau Bei Palairos, in F. Lang 2013, Interdisziplinäre Forschungen in Akarnanien, 2013, 65-80.

Lang 2013 = F. Lang - P. Funke - L. Kolonas - E.-L. Schwandner - D. Maschek, Interdisziplinäre Forschungen in Akarnanien = Διεπιστημονικές έρευνες στην Ακαρνανία, Akarnanien-Forschungen, Bonn 2013.

Sapirstein 2012 = P. Sapirstein, The monumental Archaic Roof of the Temple of Hera at Mon Repos, Corfu, in Hesperia. The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens 81, 2012, 31-91.