

CONCLUSION.
RESULTS OF ARCHAEOLOGY OF CULT AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES
ON CORCYRA AND ITS *PERAIA*

The systematic re-evaluation of archaeological evidence relating to cult practices in Corcyra and its *peraia* undertaken in this volume demonstrates the potential of cult archaeology as a privileged perspective for the study of ancient Corcyra and its relations with its *peraia* between the Archaic and early Hellenistic periods. By organizing and critically re-evaluating a highly fragmented and uneven body of data, this study has allowed to go beyond specific analyses of individual cult evidence and to explore different aspects of the archaeology of Corcyra and its relationship with the Epirote mainland. At the scale of the island, the main conclusions concern the diachronic distribution of cult evidence, the evolution of cults and their characteristics, and the relationship between sacred areas and the topography of the city. In addition, the data collected allows for a particular focus on the specific category of votive deposits from the island, moving beyond site-specific descriptions toward broader considerations of ritual practices, depositional behaviors, and the motivations underlying the formation of such contexts. Finally, the extension of the analysis to the *peraia*, and especially to the site of Butrint, shed new light on the relations with its *peraia* between the Archaic and Classical periods.

The earliest and most consistent cult evidence from Corcyra pertains to the sanctuary of Hera (**cat. 13**), whose votive assemblages, particularly metallic offerings dated to the second half of the 8th century BC, constitute the oldest votive objects on the island. These finds, closely comparable to those from other contemporary *Heraia* in the Mediterranean, point to the central civic role of Hera in the colonial foundation and early community formation of Corcyra.

Archaeological evidence becomes markedly more substantial during the Archaic period, which represents the best-documented phase both in Corcyra and in its *peraia*. The 6th century BC, in particular, shows a significant increase in the number, diversity, and monumentality of sacred contexts, including major urban sanctuaries (Hera - **cat. 13**, Artemis - **cat. 7**, Apollo - **cats. 14, 30, 32**, the so called “sanctuary of Dionysus” - **cat. 28**, the Kardaki temple - **cat. 15**) as well as smaller cult areas and votive deposits. This phase is characterized by the widespread production and use of locally made terracotta votives, indicating a shift toward a more locally grounded civic management of cult practices, closely linked to the political, economic, and commercial prosperity of the Archaic *polis*. Similar

patterns are observable in the *peraia*, especially in Butrint, where cult evidence shows strong affinities with Corcyraean material culture (cats. 54-58).

The 5th century BC marks a sharp break in the archaeological record. The *stasis* described by Thucydides is reflected in the destruction, abandonment, or interruption of activity in several major sanctuaries, both in the city and in its *peraia*. However, in Corcyra these destructive events were followed by several reconstructions. At least two important sanctuaries were rebuilt at the end of the 5th century: the *Heraion* (cat. 13) and the new temple of Apollo *Pythios* (cat. 8), which brought together the civic prerogatives of the cult previously distributed between the temenos of Apollo *Korkyraios* (cat. 14) and the sacred area of Apollo *Agyieus/Pythios* (cats. 30, 32) in the southernmost part of the Kanoni peninsula, both of which were abandoned after the destruction of the 5th century BC.

Moving from the diachronic distribution of cult evidence to the representativeness and characteristics of individual cults, the systematic analysis highlights the clear predominance of female cults in Archaic Corcyra (charts 2-3). Excluding the earliest and poorly defined evidence from the so-called “sanctuary of Dionysus” (cat. 28) the only cults securely attested between the 8th and 7th centuries BC are those of Hera and Artemis (cats. 13, 7). In this earliest phase, both cults display strong civic connotations, as demonstrated by the nature of the votive assemblages from the *Heraion* and by the liminal location of sanctuaries of Artemis within the urban and territorial landscape.

The earliest votives from the *Heraion* (8th-7th century BC) differ significantly from those of the later Archaic and Classical periods (cat. 13). Rather than reflecting a narrowly defined female sphere, these offerings, such as tripods, cauldrons, and equestrian figurines, point to a shared aristocratic value system and to the civic relevance of the cult for the entire community. The sanctuary's prominent coastal location, visible from both sea routes and the Epirote shore, further underscores its role in marking territorial possession and asserting Greek control during the colonial phase. A similar logic of territorial mediation emerges from the early phases of the *Artemision* (cat. 7), which combined urban, liminal, and protective functions connected to access routes and harbours.

The cult of Artemis and Hera in Late Geometric and Early Archaic Corcyra then both appear to be highly multifunctional. They acted simultaneously as guarantors of territorial control, civic cohesion, and biological continuity through their association with fertility and nature. Only in the course of the 6th century BC does a clearer specialization of cult identities emerge, with the increasing prominence of male deities, most notably Apollo, and the gradual transfer of explicitly civic prerogatives from previously multifunctional female divinities to male poliadic figures. At Corcyra, this process is materially expressed by the establishment of the temenos of Apollo *Korkyraios* alongside the *Heraion* and by the adoption of epithets that emphasize Apollo's civic and political role (cat. 14).

Despite the overall prominence of female cults, Aphrodite is strikingly under-represented in the archaeological record from Corcyra. The available evidence does not support the existence of a distinct cult focused on her traditional associ-

Conclusion

ations with femininity and sexuality. Where Aphrodite may be tentatively identified, her presence seems instead connected to civic prerogatives shared with other deities, or to ritual spheres overlapping with those of the Nymphs. The latter are more securely attested (**cats. 1, 16, 18**), particularly in contexts related to female life-cycle transitions, suggesting that these cults absorbed ritual functions elsewhere often associated with Aphrodite.

Among male cults, Apollo emerges as the most consistently and clearly attested from the 6th century BC onward, in his manifestations as *Korkyraios*, *Agyieus* and *Pythios* (**cats. 14, 30, 32, 8**). Zeus (**cat. 47** and with greater doubt **cats. 51-52**) and Poseidon (**cats. 5, 15**) are attested more sporadically, and their cults remain difficult to define, though a critical reassessment of votive evidence suggests that their presence at Corcyra may have been underestimated in earlier interpretations.

In the *peraia*, while the diachronic pattern of cult activity closely mirrors that observed on the island (initial emergence in the late 7th century BC, peak in the 6th century, and decline in the 5th century) the identification and characterization of specific cults are severely limited by the lack of explicit evidence. Butrint nevertheless stands out as a key case study, where the available data point to the presence of a female cult on the Archaic acropolis (**cats. 54-57**), broadly comparable to the dominant religious patterns observed in Corcyra.

The diachronic distribution of cult evidence provides a valuable framework for reassessing the spatial organization of sacred areas within the urban topography of ancient Corcyra. Although this analysis is constrained by the well-known limitations of archaeological documentation and the frequent difficulty in precisely locating published contexts, the systematic integration of available data allows for some meaningful observations, particularly regarding the southern sector of the Kanoni peninsula (**plate 2**).

All reconstructions of the ancient city identify two principal concentrations of major sanctuaries: the area of modern Mon Repos, corresponding to the “meteora” mentioned by Thucydides and interpreted as the city’s acropolis, and the urban core between the two harbours, centred on the *agora*. The acropolis area hosted the major civic sanctuaries of Hera, Apollo *Korkyraios*, and the temple of Kardaki, while other important cult places, such as the Artemision and the presumed sanctuaries of Zeus, Poseidon, and Alcinoos, were located closer to the *agora* and the harbours, emphasizing the close integration of religious space with political and economic life.

A third, distinct group of sanctuaries is concentrated in the southern part of the Kanoni peninsula, especially in its south-western sector (**plate 2**). While some cult attestations in this area are isolated and likely connected with minor or private religious practices (**cats. 26-27, 29, 31**), at least three sanctuaries stand out for their monumentality or cultic importance: the so-called “sanctuary of Dionysus” (**cat. 28**), the “small sanctuary of Artemis” (**cat. 33**), and the sanctuary of Apollo *Agyieus* (**cats. 30, 32**). Despite uncertainties regarding the precise identification of some of these cults, their archaeological significance and early dates, particularly the proto-altar beneath the late Archaic temple in the so-called sanctuary of Dionysus (**cat. 28**), highlight the antiquity and importance of religious activity

in this peripheral zone of the city. However, these southern sanctuaries appear to have been excluded from the city walls constructed in the 5th century BC (**plate 2**). Although the reconstruction of the Classical fortification circuit remains problematic, current hypotheses suggest that the southernmost sector of the peninsula, including key sanctuaries of Artemis and Apollo (**cats. 33, 30, 32**) lay outside the fortified perimeter. The exclusion of cultically important but topographically peripheral areas from the fortified city seems to reflect broader transformations affecting Corcyra in the 5th century BC. The island's involvement in the Peloponnesian War, the outbreak of *stasis*, and the simultaneous weakening of its control over the *peraia* all point to a period of crisis, which may also explain the redefinition of urban space and defensive priorities. At the same time, this archaeological picture contrasts with the historical tradition, which continues to present Corcyra as a strategically significant power in the Ionian-Adriatic world throughout the 4th century BC and into the Hellenistic period. The scarcity of Late Classical and Hellenistic archaeological data prevents a detailed reconstruction of this phase, but it is clear that, despite territorial losses in the mainland and possible urban contraction, Corcyra retained the resources and strategic capacity to maintain a prominent regional role.

Finally, the analysis of cult evidence reinforces the strong connection between the cult of Artemis and the protection of liminal zones and access points to the city. Both the *Artemision* (**cat. 7**) and the "small sanctuary of Artemis" (**cat. 33**) occupy positions that are marginal yet strategically crucial, overseeing harbour entrances, wetlands, and boundary areas that mediated between the urban space and the external world. From the earliest phases of the colony, Artemis functioned as a guarantor of balance between the polis and its surroundings, a role that also evolved from safeguarding the colonial enterprise to symbolically supporting Corcyra's control over its territory and *peraia* in the 6th century BC (**cat. 7**).

Although votive deposits represent only a minority of the catalogued cult attestations (**chart 1**), they provide a privileged perspective for the study of cult archaeology in Corcyra and its *peraia*. The systematic organization of the evidence allows votive deposits to be classified according to their informational potential, depositional dynamics, and relationship with sacred spaces.

Based on the quality and quantity of available documentation, the votive deposits from Corcyra can be divided into two main groups. A first group comprises contexts for which sufficiently detailed information is available to allow in-depth analysis of their formation processes, spatial relationships, and material composition (**cats. 7, 13, 18, 21, 33**, cf. **tab. Depositi votivi**). Within this group, the deposit from the Vlachopoulou plot (6th - early 5th century BC) stands out as the only securely identified primary deposit. Its integrity, combined with clear traces of ritual actions, such as libations, burning, and the deliberate fragmentation or inversion of drinking vessels, offers rare insight into ritual practices associated with a domestic sanctuary. Although the specific occasion of the ritual cannot be securely identified, this context represents the most direct archaeological evidence for structured cult behaviour in a non-monumental, household setting at Corcyra (**cat. 28**).

Conclusion

All other well-documented deposits from the island represent secondary contexts and can be interpreted as deposits of dismissal. Their formation reflects a dual motivation: the ritual necessity of preserving sacred objects and the practical need to clear space within sanctuaries undergoing transformation or reconstruction. The foundation deposits associated with the late 5th-century BC reorganization of the *Heraion* exemplify this category (**cat. 13**). These pits contain heterogeneous material (architectural fragments, ceramics, terracottas, and metal votives) collected after the violent destruction of the sanctuary during the *stasis* and redeposited as part of the construction of a new peribolos. A comparable pattern is observable at the Artemision, where obsolete architectural terracottas were intentionally accumulated within the sanctuary following their replacement by marble elements (**cat. 7**).

Other secondary deposits can be more precisely classified as *favissae*, representing the intentional accumulation of votive material formerly displayed or used in different areas of a sanctuary. The *favissa* from the Evelpidi-Pamphili plot (**cat. 21**) and the deposit from the “small sanctuary of Artemis” (**cat. 33**) illustrate different aspects of this practice. The latter, composed exclusively of terracotta figurines, preserves evidence for an internal order of deposition by object type, suggesting a careful and meaningful transfer of votives from their original locations. Similarly, the careful arrangement of figurines in the Evelpidi-Pamphili deposit points to a ritualized process of removal and storage rather than casual disposal.

A second group includes deposits for which the available evidence is too limited to support comparable levels of interpretation. These contexts are generally identified as votive deposits on the basis of the concentration of objects belonging to typically ritual categories, such as terracotta figurines, kalathiskoi, or libation vessels. While it is plausible that these assemblages originated from intentional depositional acts, the lack of contextual data prevents any secure reconstruction of their formation processes or associated rituals.

Finally, the revision of the evidence from the *peraia* has offered new insights into the relationship between the island and the mainland in the Archaic and Classical periods. Archaeological contexts from the acropolis of Butrint, the most important and best-known site in the Corcyrean *peraia* consistently attest to a Corcyraean presence from the late 7th century BC onward, following only sporadic earlier activity. From the late 6th century BC, and more markedly during the 5th century BC, the material record shows a sharp decline in ceramic imports, which are rare and do not extend beyond the mid-5th century BC. This progressive impoverishment of the material record appears to predate the events of the *stasis* described by Thucydides and suggests that the crisis affecting Corcyra during the Peloponnesian War unfolded against a background of already strained relations with its *peraia*. While the apparent early abandonment or marginalization of Butrint contrasts with the image of Corcyra at the height of its power in the late 5th century BC, the combined evidence from the island and the mainland points instead to a broader phase of instability and reorganization. From at least the second half of the 5th century BC, Corcyra seems to have definitively lost control of its *peraia*, as shown in Butrint,

which only re-emerges archaeologically at the end of the 4th century BC as part of the Epirote koine.

A key result of the analysis concerns the functional character of Archaic and Classical Butrint. The strong predominance of fine and ritual ceramics, together with evidence for a *bothros* and architectural elements likely belonging to a cult building, indicates that the acropolis functioned primarily as a sacred area (cats. 54-55). While earlier reconstructions of a monumental Archaic temple dedicated to Athena *Polias* remains hypothetical (cat. 56), the presence of a cult, probably female in character, during the Archaic and Classical periods appears well supported. Conversely, the available archaeological evidence does not substantiate the identification of Butrint as one of the fortified settlements (*teiche*) of the Corcyraean *peraia* mentioned by Thucydides.

At the same time, evidence from the wider territory points to a more complex settlement system than that suggested by the acropolis alone. The Dema wall, the fortified sites of Kalivo and Karalibeu (plate 1), and the comparable case of Mastilita (cat. 57) organized around fortifications, a sanctuary, and a necropolis, indicate a network of strategically positioned sites rather than a dense or continuous occupation of the mainland. Within this framework, Corcyraean presence appears to have been selective and functionally oriented toward controlling key nodes, such as access to inland resources and maritime routes through the Ionian Sea, rather than toward systematic territorial domination.

The synthesis of data also highlights the difficulty of defining the precise boundaries of the Corcyraean *peraia*, especially toward the south and east. While some sites suggest Corcyra-mediated connections with the Epirote hinterland, the current picture is heavily conditioned by the uneven state of archaeological research. Ongoing and future investigations in these areas are therefore crucial for testing and refining the hypotheses proposed here.

In light of all the considerations derived from the synthesis of data and the new insights that emerged from it, the analysis of evidence of worship proved to be a privileged point of view on the archaeology of Corcyra for many reasons. The study of archaeological data has made it possible to analyze both the more material aspects of the contexts and objects cataloged, as well as their symbolic meaning as sacred objects linked to specific cults or rituals.

From this purely archaeological perspective, it was then possible to identify the characteristics of some cults attested in Corcyra and to follow their evolution in relation to that of the development of the Corinthian colony, also touching on issues not strictly related to the archaeology of cult and the analysis of cult identities, which present themselves as future research prospects both in Corcyra and in the territories of its *peraia*. The revision and systematization of known archaeological data, together with considerations arising from the characteristics of the cults, contribute to revealing the enormous potential on which to base future studies, in the hope that the conclusions of this study may constitute only the starting point for the development of new research on the archaeology and history of archaic-classical Corcyra and its relations with the Epirote mainland.