

The Ploutonion of Hierapolis in light of recent research (2013-17)

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The discovery of the Ploutonion

The Ploutonion of Hierapolis (Phrygia) is mentioned in numerous Greek and Latin literary sources, which stress its distinctive natural features and the rites that were performed there. From the 19th c. onwards, this sanctuary was the object of investigations and hypotheses on the part of various scholars regarding its exact location, without however reaching a satisfactory solution to the problem.¹ The famous place of worship was finally identified thanks to a large-scale topographic survey of the entire settlement and the surrounding area, undertaken by the Italian Archaeological Mission (hereafter MAIER) as part of the creation of the Atlas (*Atlante*) of Hierapolis.² Specifically, in the area south of the Sanctuary of Apollo, as a result of these investigations various masonry structures belonging to monumental buildings were discovered. Also found in the area were sculpted marble capitals with lions attacking bulls and Ionic capitals with masks, which had clearly been brought from the Stoa-basilica, built in the Antonine period along the E side of the North Agora.

Another feature of the area was the presence of the richest and most active thermal springs, which now flow along a modern channel into the large swimming pool or lake of the Pamukkale Termal. Today this facility represents one of the site's greatest tourist attractions, due to the opportunity it provides for visitors to take a dip in its tepid mineral waters while swimming among columns and other marble architectural features. Recent research has attributed these structures to the Civil Agora, identifying its connections with the ancient buildings that surrounded it, today buried beneath a thick layer of travertine deposits.³ A phenomenon which had long drawn the attention of the present author was the daily presence near the source of the spring of dead birds, suffocated by the fumes of carbon dioxide.⁴ These elements prompted the archaeological mission to begin, in 2008, the systematic excavations that would lead to the discovery of the Sanctuary of Hades, one of the greatest *paradoxologiai* in Hierapolis. Investigations in the broad area south of the

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- 1 On the history of the research, see F. D'Andria, "Il Ploutonion a Hierapolis di Frigia," *IstMitt* 63 (2013) 182-89; on the sanctuary, see also P. Panarelli, "Il cosiddetto 'Santuario delle Sorgenti' (Ploutonion): le attività di scavo 2008-2011," in F. D'Andria, M. P. Caggia and T. Ismaelli (edd.), *Le attività delle campagne di scavo e restauro 2007-2011*, (Hierapolis di Frigia VIII; Istanbul 2016) 293-320; F. D'Andria, T. Ismaelli and P. Panarelli, "Initial data on the supply of marble for the Ploutonion," in T. Ismaelli and G. Scardozzi (edd.), *Ancient quarries and building sites in Asia Minor ... Archaeology, archaeometry, conservation* (Bari 2016) 365-72; S. Bozza, "The Ionic portico of the Ploutonion in Hierapolis in Phrygia," in Ismaelli and Scardozzi *ibid.* 373-84.
 - 2 F. D'Andria, G. Scardozzi and A. Spanò, *Atlante di Hierapolis di Frigia* (Hierapolis di Frigia II; Istanbul 2008); G. Scardozzi, "Caratteristiche e trasformazioni dell'impianto urbano tra l'età ellenistica e l'epoca ottomana," in *id.*(ed.), *Nuovo atlante di Hierapolis di Frigia: cartografia archeologica della città e delle necropoli* (Hierapolis di Frigia VII; Istanbul 2015) 35-57.
 - 3 T. Ismaelli, G. Scardozzi and S. Bozza, "L'agorà centrale di Hierapolis di Frigia," *Mare Internum* 9 (2017) 113-40.
 - 4 H. Pfanz *et al.*, "The ancient gates to Hell and their relevance to geogenic CO₂," in P. Wexler (ed.), *History of toxicology and environmental health: toxicology in antiquity*, vol. I (Amsterdam 2014) 110-12; S. Vettori *et al.*, "Marble from Hierapolis: decay, conservation, monitoring of surfaces and environment," in Ismaelli and Scardozzi 2016 (*supra* n.1) 562-64.